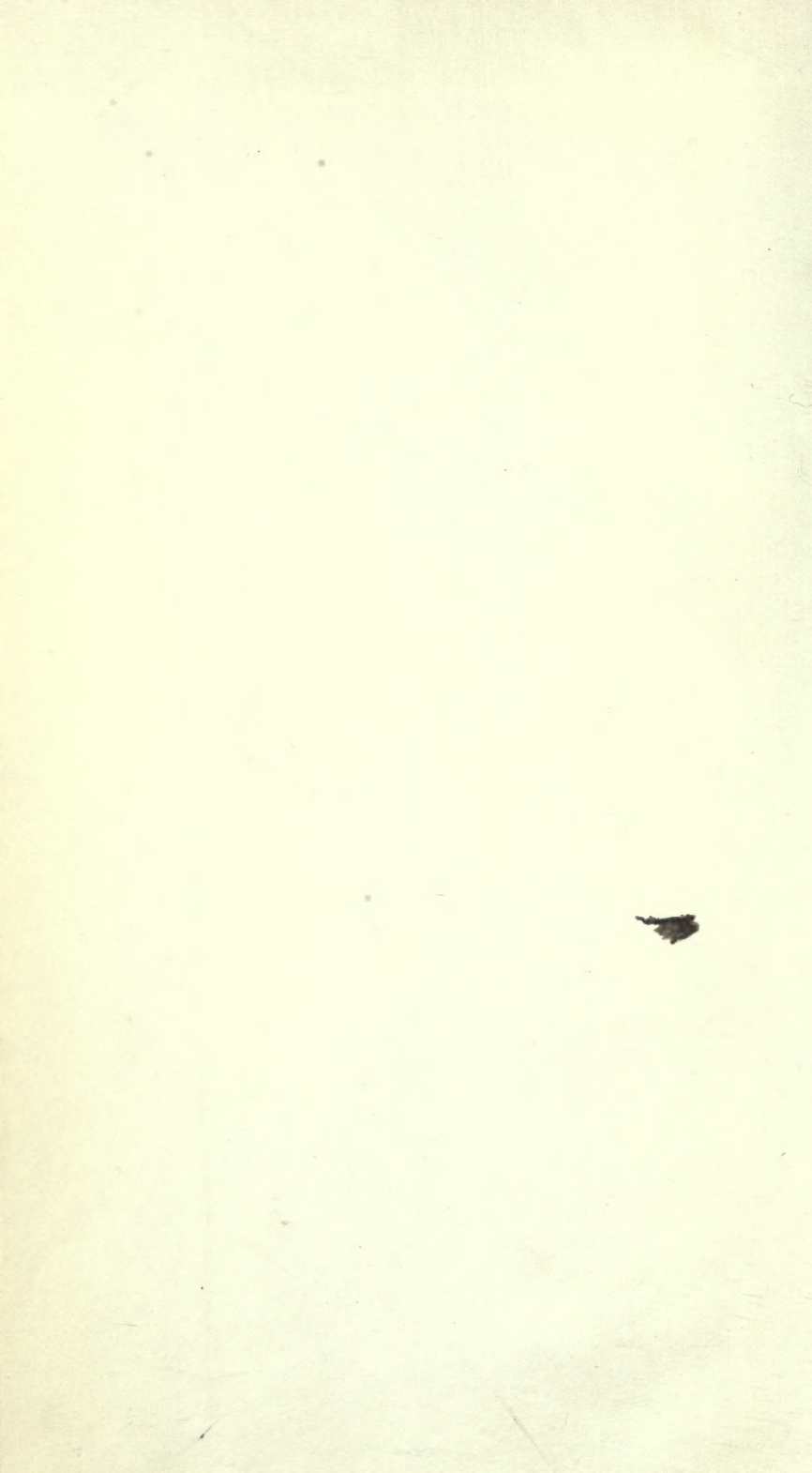




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QUEEN MARIAMNE



✓

'Truly at first sight I loved her, I who had slain her kin,
Ay, by the life of thy father, not in inconstancy.
Love, thou hast taken possession. Deem it not otherwise.
Thou in my heart art the first one, first in nobility.'

Ode of the Arabian Antára.

PERSONS REPRESENTED

HEROD, an Idumæan Arab, Tetrarch of Judæa, afterward King of Jewry.

ALEXANDER, ARISTOBULUS, Herod's sons by Mariamne.

ANTONY, OCTAVIUS CÆSAR, LEPIDUS, the Triumvirate.

ARISTOBULUS, Herod's brother-in-law, of the Royal Asmonean race, whom he has dispossessed with the help of the Romans.

JOSEPH, husband of Herod's sister Salome.

SOHEMUS, Herod's trusted commander.

NICHOLAS OF DAMASCUS, an historian, the friend of Herod.

BABBAS, SHEMAIAH, members of the Sanhedrim.

ALEXAS, SELEUCUS, servants to Cleopatra.

MARIAMNE, Herod's wife, of the old Royal race.

ALEXANDRA, Mariamne's mother, once Queen of Judæa.

CYPROS, Herod's Arabian mother.

SALOME, Herod's sister.

CLEOPATRA, Queen of Egypt.

CHARMIAN, her woman.

ANAKE, Charmian's sister.

FIELD, MICHAEL (pseud.)

IX

QUEEN MARIAMNE

BY THE AUTHOR OF

‘BORGIA’



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QUEEN MARIAMNE

ACT I

SCENE I

Jericho: the garden of the royal pleasure-house. In front a bathing-tank; above it terraces masked by balm-shrubs. A voice is heard calling:

Mariamne! Mariamne!

Can she have slipped down from the parapet?

[HEROD *is seen through the branches.*

HEROD. Or has she crept to the smooth tanks
to breathe

The air of the water?

No, the bathing-tanks

Are guarded for some sport,

[*Cries and laughter of unseen swimmers.*

And there is congregation on the shores.

If she could know, if she could but conceive!

A moment's absence tightens all my breath!

Mariamne! Mariamne!

How often I evoke her to the echo!

Mariamne! Very oft

I call down to my soul to her, and there

She answers in abundance, as the corn

That the large waters woo to sudden tilth.

I would that she were only in my soul!

. . . . On every element

I call to do her injury. . . . I love her

The way I hate a foe I cannot strike.

[The sound of laughter and cries is now close.]

My Gauls at play!—

[To a boy, who rests on the edge of the tank.]

Child, you are bathing? Child,

To watch your feats!

ARISTOBULUS. But I must rest a little.

HEROD. Lay your clothes on you; rest within my tent.

ARISTOBULUS (*laughing and pointing to the Gauls*). Not while this rank of glittering teeth and eyes

Is fastened on me—no !

Your Gauls can swim ; they challenge,
Till I am turned to dolphin, or a boat
Shot by Phœnician skill to sea. Their
challenge

Must have a royal answer. I must
triumph,

Must I not, Herod ?—or my royal blood
Were undistinguished in this drowsy
pool.

I rest for safer triumph. Then to dive
Under the water and there hear the
shouts

Of the people who applaud my art and
worship

Outside my crystal walls !

HEROD. Are you a god ?

I sometimes fear that you may be Apollo.

Caress me, O my dear !

You sail away ?

[ARISTOBULUS *dives*. HEROD *gazes out as*
if he had lost something.

ARISTOBULUS (*reappearing at HEROD'S feet*).

Ha, brother !—this my homage.

HEROD. O plunged swan,
Is this your homage?

Dive down in the water!

You dazzle me too much.

ARISTOBULUS. I am scarcely breathed.

HEROD. No. . . . I would have you, all your
beauty, held

Safe down in yonder crystal. I would hear
No more of homage, triumph, god or man,
Ambition, rivalry. I would stoop down,
And hear the pond lap over you, and know
Your sovereign, lovely body safe beneath.
Safe . . . Do you stare?

Ay, safe as gods are in their hyaline,
Assuaging and eternal, armed with distance
As with a silver mail. . . . Aristobulus!
A perfect priest and king for shawms to
greet,
But in retirement, safe. . . . Aristobulus!—
And only mine.

[*He bends above* ARISTOBULUS.

. . . You are her very image.

Why have the sons and daughters of old
kings

These lids, this arrogance of lip?

My wilful,

Why do you lie and rest so in the sun,

Idling your powers away?

[To certain of the Gauls, who have been following his every word and motion.

Dive, dive!

My Beauty,

Have you no breath for this?

. . . The smiling water

Must be your element—to play with it,

As birds play with the air around.

Delicious

The water and the musky scents!

[They remain still and enjoying.

ARISTOBULUS.

See, Herod,

Your divers reappear.

HEROD (*hastily rising*). You love the water!

I am jealous. Drink,

Drink of it till you are a very god!

[He watches the bubbles on the surface of the water, then climbs the terraces.

Close-covered as the dead be those I
love . . .

Sunk down, and to the source
Of my desire. . . . Death, death!

*[His voice rolls out like a peal of low
thunder in a radiant sky.]*

SCENE II

Masada, by the Dead Sea

ALEXANDRA and MARIAMNE

MARIAMNE *is sitting listless.* ALEXANDRA
approaches her with jewels

MARIAMNE. I will not give him pleasure.

ALEXANDRA. Child,
He is parting from you; he may not re-
turn.

[MARIAMNE stares fixedly in a mirror.]
What is it?

A bloom is on your beauty like the dew.

What is it?

[QUEEN ALEXANDRA looks into the mirror.]
MARIAMNE. You behold!

ALEXANDRA. My beauty, my heart's fashioning,
my jewel . . .

A little pale, fairer about the eyes—
My daughter!

MARIAMNE. No—your son, your murdered son.

He beckons me each time I face the mirror;
He comes up from the water through the
metal;

He shines distorted . . .

ALEXANDRA (*clasping* MARIAMNE). Hush!

MARIAMNE. He comes to me . . .

For we are children, for we love each other.

He tells me all his secrets; I have this.

My heart is with him. How can you forget?

ALEXANDRA. Child, you must come to take the
scent of blood

As simply as it were the scent of roses.

Grow winsome to your husband, give him
pleasure:

All sullenness in woman is defeat. . . .

[*She draws her daughter again to
her side.*

How can you see down to the heart of things?

You must have many secrets yielded up,
Not one, if you would move soft-footedly
About the world and sway it to your will.
Listen a little. . . . You are hard, you took
No heed of Herod at the funeral. . . .

MARIAMNE. That he should weep! He moved
you by his weeping.

It is the ghosts that move me, and the ghosts
Alone that I can comfort. They are helpless
As children, and they cry to me; the old
Cry to me as the young—my grandfather
Murdered by Herod and my brother murdered.

ALEXANDRA. Child, you are very deaf to human
sounds;

You are yourself a ghost, a mystery,
Almost to me who bore you, a dismay.
What would you have—revenge?

[MARIAMNE *shakes her head.*

MARIAMNE. There, mother, deck me
With these long chains and chains.

[ALEXANDRA *adorns her with ropes of pearls
and amethysts; MARIAMNE looks up at
her mother and smiles.*

How do men love?

ALEXANDRA. They love a little while : they
love but beauty.

MARIAMNE (*gazing into the mirror*). Oh, then,
I have no fear : I am eternal.

[QUEEN ALEXANDRA'S face glows as MARI-
AMNE rises. HEROD enters.

HEROD. Mariamne !

[*He pauses, bowing profoundly to QUEEN
ALEXANDRA.*

ALEXANDRA. Son, I have dressed her for you,
have perfumed

And dressed her.

HEROD. You have dressed her as a queen,
Queen Mariamne.

ALEXANDRA (*with deep obeisance*). I yield now
my place ;

And blessing on you, blessing !

[HEROD bows again and watches the QUEEN
retire, staring blankly as in a trance.

HEROD.

Mariamne,

I have been musing. . . . How shall I bid
farewell ?

You are shaken. Speak !

If I died from you . . . and to Antony

I pass, to my extremest foe, to peril

Of my fortune and my life—say, can you live?

[MARIAMNE *is silent*.

(*Softly, in her ear.*) My flower! death may
be painless, sudden, joyous,

A wafting into bliss.

MARIAMNE (*speaking as if from sleep*). There
is drowning. . . . No,

I would not drown myself;

I would not you should order me that death.

HEROD. My flower!—your death?

I am thinking of my death and of your tears.

Mariamne, would you live

When my great love to you is dumb?

MARIAMNE.

I love

The dead so dearly!

HEROD. Could you mourn me, then,

Life-long, shut in this fortress of Masada?

Could you make all its walls a lamentation?

MARIAMNE. I never shall lament the dead—
my days

Were a long mourning if I mourned the dead.

HEROD. Beloved, my bitter-herbs, my sacred
feast,

Be not too bitter!

MARIAMNE.

I have many tears :

My mother says that I must dry my tears.

HEROD. A smile, that is the shadow of a bird

In a deep pool—but still a smile !

Blest be your mother ; I will leave you with
her.

MARIAMNE. She hates you : do not leave me
with my mother.

HEROD. I will leave you with my sister, for
she loves me.

MARIAMNE. Salome ? Does she love you ?

HEROD. Sweetness of flowering vineyards on
your voice !

My wine in flower, are you but flower ? A
dream ?

*[With a gesture toward the plain of the
Dead Sea.*

Desert acacias, desert spring !

O Mariamne !

*[Round every hill and cranny the words are
murmured in confusing mockery, until
distinct in every syllable they are re-
turned. MARIAMNE comes up to him and
takes the fringes of his robe in her hand.*

MARIAMNE. Yea, my lord?

HEROD. Mariamne.

Your touch—my cheek, my neck!

You shall not finger

The tassels of my tunic as a slave.

[Laying her head back on his arm.

O my Judæa,

I fable to your people I was born

Of Jewish race from Babylon—I fable!

Here, in the austere country of my fathers,

And with your tendrilled face upon my arm,

I do not juggle. I am a son of Esau,

Who has snatched back again his riven
blessing

From Israel. O garden of your land!

If I should die . . .

I have never spared . . . Mariamne,

Can I spare? . . .

O garden of your land, is this surrender?

Is this thyself? Abandonment of love!—

A swoon! . . . Salome!

Re-enter QUEEN ALEXANDRA *with* JOSEPH

She is gone!

ALEXANDRA. You have killed her?

HEROD. No.

ALEXANDRA. Lift the pearls back from her throat.

(To JOSEPH.) Fetch cordials. [*Exit* JOSEPH.
What have you done?

HEROD. 'Midmost of my caress
She sank my arm . . .

Revive her, bring her back!

ALEXANDRA. Lift her, and let me take her to
my lap.

HEROD (*snatching a phial from JOSEPH'S hand*).
Dew on her, dew!

[*He wildly scatters the cordial over her as
if scattering incense.*

ALEXANDRA. Let her not wake and see your
face. My daughter

Is fragile, your embraces,

Herod, too fervent. See, her colour comes.

Kiss her as you would kiss a babe asleep . . .

Rise softly, very softly step aside.

[HEROD *kisses* MARIAMNE, and then with-
draws to the entrance of the room, where
he whispers to his brother-in-law.

HEROD. Joseph, you are her guardian. You
reply

For her as would a common sentinel ;

And as I have commanded be it done.

JOSEPH. To the extreme of your commands,
my lord

And brother. God be with you !

HEROD.

God with her !

[*Exit.*

ACT II

SCENE I

Alexandria. The palace of the Ptolomies.

CLEOPATRA *sits on her throne, her chin deep in her hand, her eyes narrow as a crocodile's on the top of the water.* CHARMIAN *fans her. In the foreground, to the left and right, groups of women and eunuchs are just seen.*

CHARMIAN. Madam, what is it you are coveting?

[CLEOPATRA *is silent.* CHARMIAN *fans for a while in silence.*

Madam, your sighs are for the world? Such sighs!

Not as the winds that rise and fall again
On their own breath, but rather hurricanes
That go forth over provinces and kingdoms!

Are they for Persia?

[CLEOPATRA *does not answer.*

No—then Araby,
The desert-brazier, sand and spice together? . . .

For Ethiopia and the amber streams,
Or Syria's merchant coasts? . . .
Or for Judæa's milk and honey, Egypt
Has ever coveted?

Ah, madam, madam!
They are for Jericho. So often laying
Your myrrhs and balsams to your flesh, you
quarrel
With the poor jars that are your sole
possession,
While the myrrh-bearing, balsam-scented city
Stands alien by its waters. Jericho!

[CLEOPATRA *slides her eyes towards*
CHARMIAN.

You are grown still, you do not eat. I fear
you.

CLEOPATRA. Seleucus!

[*Her eyes wake and glitter as her
treasurer enters.*

Did you find a hoard of money?
And had the goddess jewels?

SELEUCUS. Tremblingly
We crept about the temple in the dusk,
Sepulchral hours, between the nadir dark-
ness

And dawn—we dared not light a lamp.

CLEOPATRA. You found?

SELEUCUS. This gold.

CLEOPATRA (*trying it in her hand*). Loaden
with joy—Seleucus! And the jewels?

SELEUCUS (*untying a striped silk*). These
rubies—pearls from off their string. . . .

CLEOPATRA. The gold
Build up in your rock-treasuries and seal.
These in my lap to feed me as with music!

[*Exit* SELEUCUS.]

See my red roses, Charmian ; see
My lilies in this basket . . .

[*The gems lie in the hollow of her knees.*

And my dew
Of a whole daydreak. Ha, what pilfering
Of Heaven! Poor Isis!

[*She covers the jewels with her hands.*

CHARMIAN. Have you no alarm?
Madam . . . the goddess! It is daylight
now—

Her ravaged image . . .

CLEOPATRA. Blasphemy!—
Her image!

This veil embraces me, and it is mine,
To the finest dint of the temples—I am
Isis,
Soothing her jewels with my hands. Behold
them!

[*Plunging her hands into the mass.*
These do not faint, nor fleet, nor fade—be-
hold,
Pale are my fingers from this luxury
And contact as they pat the crystal
flesh
Of all this light and bloom a-dangle.

(*Settling herself.*) Peace
To one desire—but one!

CHARMIAN. Unbosom, Queen!

I fear you . . .

The passion of some great aggrandisement
Contracts your face.

If I should give you a full-freighted
vessel . . .

Oh, you are easily content! I thought
You had ambition.

HEROD. I must sail to Rome :
My fortunes hang upon my speed.

CLEOPATRA. O puppet,
Frank-spoken babe! And how will you
achieve?

Will you malign dead Cassius?

HEROD. My terms
Are proffer of a service of the girth
I stretched to my dear friend, dead Cassius.
My prelude will be praise of Cassius.

CLEOPATRA (*to CHARMIAN and her women*).
Have you considered him—this lofty Idu-
mæan,

This Tetrarch who is Tetrarch on the ruins
Of the old royal house? How soaringly
Composed the bushy blackness of his hair!
How he aspires!

Behold him
Suppliant to me and suppliant for a ship!
[She rises suddenly, and all the goddess's

jewels fall about her with the sound of hail. The women and eunuchs go down on their knees.

'Tis death to touch one droplet.

Call Seleucus

To number them and dress them on a dish.

(*To HEROD.*) If I should give you a full-freighted vessel . . .

I will not : you must take another boon.

For you shall be the Captain of my forces,

My Ethiopians, Numidian bands,

My varied hosts from Syria and from Gaul.

My hosts with intermingled tongues shall learn

Your watchwords, your command.

Now ask as greatly

As I confer. Be level with us, Herod.

The sports of royalties are royal sports.

So modest—so the Jew !

[*Caressingly catching at one of the chains hung about his neck.*

And Mariamne

Despises you, O Splendour of the Desert !

Will you be as the thick-tiæred Romans,
Who can take ship, reluctant as Æneas,
Swift ship to Rome?

Will you not stay awhile,
My cavaliering Herod? This impa-
tience

Is of the wilds. . . . Will you not stay
With Cleopatra? This is her petition,
Coupled with angry and forbidding tears.

HEROD. Queen, I must follow, where your
heart is gone,

To Antony. I am unfortunate

In such deep need of pardon.

[SELEUCUS *re-enters*.

CLEOPATRA.

Antony

Is here, and all your grace.

HEROD. You are all bounty, all forgiveness,
madam!

For you and your august protection,
tribute!

The honey of a province—for the ship
That you will grant my need, since I must
sail.

[*He lays a heavy purse in her hands.*

CLEOPATRA (*holding it out*). Seleucus,
tribute!

[*She lays it on the great dish amid the
pearls and rubies. Exit SELEUCUS.*

I will send my letter

By post as swift as Auster. Have no
fear.

Mark Antony to kiss the manuscript
Would diadem you king of all Judæa. . . .
Come, closer. . . . All your secrets
Are cherished in my bosom. Alexandra
Has wept me all her wrongs. . . . Herod,
there are
Soft deaths that buoy our rule—a priest's,
my brother's—
Scarcely fifteen. And on your side a
priest,
Almost a brother, in the dawn of youth,
They say, has died from you. . . .

Are you so angry?

Do not be angry! Hush!
Out of the clay of Nile our lotus-flower
Lifts a perfumed and mitred face.
Fear me not—I can cover many sins.

HEROD. Why should I fear you? I have
naught to fear

From women's machinations or their wiles.
If you will grant no ship—my way to Rome
Is by the sea. . . . Farewell!

[He turns to the door.]

CLEOPATRA (*to* CHARMIAN). He does not fire;
he is a beast and slow,

A sullen beast—an elephant

Of drowsy mood. . . . What shall I put
before him,

What blood of mulberries, what blood of
grapes,

To rouse his blood to answerable tides?

Herod, come back!

My Captain Herod. . . .

Do you see the storm?

Even as a sorceress I know our winds;

This storm will wreck you.

HEROD. I am bound for Rome,

No peril on that voyage! What command,

What message shall I bear to Antony?

CLEOPATRA. Is Antony away?

Herod, my fleets shall dance into the port,

Soon as the waves grow small to ripples, soon
As the air floats again: you shall have
choice

Of all my painted sails.

Embark not now,

Not now [HEROD flees.

[*A whirlwind enters the palace.*

(*Calling after him.*) Æneas! Nay,

No Roman! Cæsar, Antony, Pompeius!—

No Roman!—Gone

Away, as from the wife of Potiphar,

From me, from Egypt—me!

Alexas! heigh, Alexas! [*He comes to her.*

Have they yet strangled us the Jewish
slave

Of Antony's, who spurned our image? No?

Then strangle us the slave as with our hands.

[*She shrieks.*

Light! Swing the curtains! Light!

[*The curtains are swung wide.*

Am I turned owl? It hurts me . . .

Nakedness!

My ceremonies gone!

[*The curtains are drawn round.*

A stifling dark—such heat!

(*In a whisper.*) Bid them fetch snow
From the Moon-mountains, where I may
conceive

The snow eternal. Let my coursers strain
South to the mountains, and should any fall,
Leave them to starve! Snow from the
mountains, snow!

Charmian, if I fail . . . Time is so slack. . . .
Bring me cyprinum-oil to turn my senses
Hard, lest I faint and die . . .

A strong scent! . . . Jasminum!
[*She lies back among her cushions, covering
with each hand the gold stars embroidered
on each breast.*]

SCENE II

Rome

HEROD, *with* MARK ANTONY *and* OCTAVIUS
CÆSAR, *stands on the steps outside the
Capitol.*

OCTAVIUS. Have no disquiet.
Your simple speech of love for Cassius

Is as a kingdom's birth to you—so royally
Should faith be nurtured, and a feeling brain.
Antipater, your father, was the friend
Of Rome through a whole lifetime ; and your
faith

Has not removed from Rome, though Cassius
shed

The noblest Roman blood.

ANTONY. But, Herod, letters
Are come from Cleopatra that attain
Your virtue and your mercy.

HEROD. Wah!—what charge?

ANTONY. That tacitly you killed Aristobulus.
Sweet-lipped, assailing boy—why, his rose-
picture

Had pleaded to old Fate.

HEROD. And you believe it?
A mother's grief darkened and spread
Out of its night this dream—as women show
Ever a pregnant grief.

The child was drowned
In sport with others, challenged headily
By emulation. I had clothed him priest—
High-priest of Israel.

ANTONY. He was the last
Of kingly breeding.

HEROD. Mariamne's brother.

ANTONY. By heaven! their dam sent me their
portraits once—

A girl and boy to smite their sorcery
On the taut senses. Herod, you are crowned
In Mariamne.

HEROD. She is royal.

ANTONY. She is fairer
Than any breathing.

OCTAVIUS. Cleopatra, hear!

ANTONY. Let her be deaf as ostrich of the
sands!

She is not fair, ye gods—she is complete,
And fast as Circe on her worshippers.

(*To HEROD.*) You paused in Egypt?

HEROD. True ;
But did not know the queen my enemy.

ANTHONY. She wants Judæa.

Herod,
You shall not, on my word, be dispossessed.
And, if Octavius smile, your Tetrarchy,
Since you aver Aristobulus' death

To be of chance, and sorrow to your heart,
Shall be returned to you a kingdom.

OCTAVIUS. Ay,
King of Judæa!

ANTONY. Give to Mariamne
A king for her embraces—women glow
Their arms round sovereignty.

HEROD. My faith is sure.
And it is great to know where greatness
 sways,

To take its current. All magnificence
Is—journeying with the greatness of oneself,
Or destiny's or God's. Fair-valed Judæa
Shall become Roman and attain the world.

OCTAVIUS. A compeer, Herod! Well that
Cleopatra,

Behind the lasting walls of Egypt, drew you
Into no sunned captivity. Ha, ha!
She is a mighty idler.

ANTONY. She so covets
Fair-valed Judæa, you, it seems, had wel-
come
Of bitter flavour . . . so the letter vouches.
But I shall value faith and governance

Out in the boist'rous Orient of the Jews.

Ah! has she faith or governance, this queen,
Save as a dusky Venus?

(*To HEROD.*) Well?

HEROD. Mark Antony, the truth I gave dead
Cassius

I plight you in the East: arms, treasure,
victuals,

Beyond my kingdom's tribute, shall be yours.

[*They join hands.*]

OCTAVIUS. Come down with me!

You have been asking for the webs of Cos,
Tissues of Indian byssus. We have stalls
In the Forum Pacis and the Via Sacra
Worth a king's visit.

[*LEPIDUS comes out of the Capitol.*]

Ay, there, Lepidus.

This is the daybreak of a sovereignty;

Herod is monarch of the Jews.

LEPIDUS.

Brave Herod!

Salve, Herodes! Then we must banquet
him.

[*They move down the steps, leaving*

ANTONY.

OCTAVIUS. We are going to buy stuffs.

LEPIDUS. Not Antony?

OCTAVIUS. No, Herod—where I bought but
yesterday . . .

LEPIDUS. Not for Scribonia ; for Nero's wife,
Livia Drusilla . . .

OCTAVIUS. Where I bought a veil.

HEROD. This broad and pillared Rome!—
My Jewish cities

Are lowly scattered . . .

ANTONY (*calling*). Herod!

(*To OCTAVIUS and LEPIDUS.*) Go your
way ;

Herod will follow—he is swift of foot,

An antelope. [*They descend.*

Herod!

HEROD. What would you?

ANTONY. See,

I have given you a realm to gild the plea-
sure

Of Mariamne . . . and have seen your eyes
Travel in royal progress far away.

I know . . . but, man, I have displeased a
queen,

Defied her letter : I must give her sugars
And incense to appease. . . . Necessity
Shears you of Jericho.

HEROD. The plots of balm!—
There only in the world?

ANTONY. And you must lose
The towns within the river Eleutherus.
I am ashamed, but the necessity
Is hotter than my blush.

HEROD. Your will !
[*He walks abruptly away.*]

ANTONY. A man
Of the Lions' Country! . . .
She shall have six cities.
Six?—Seven; two pearls from Persia—and
a letter!

SCENE III

*A hall in the royal house of the Asmoneans
at Alexandrium*

SALOME is seated, weaving a scarlet girdle.

HEROD *enters.* Taking SALOME'S hand, he sweeps her along with him as he crosses the apartment.

HEROD. There is a pearl, as somewhere in the
sea

There is a pearl the diver does not find,
Strains for in blindness, gropes for in the
dark!

The diver rises bleeding for the air . . .
Sweet, will you aid me? Sweet, there is no
treasure

I lacked in boyhood that your love attained
not.

Win me her love,
This Mariamne, till she love as thou,
Down where there is no speech. She is
withholden.

Salome, I beseech her at your hands!

[Pushing her away.]

Salome, I so fear to look on her . . .

(After a pause.) Oh, it would kill her
To spread before her vision, even in cleft,
The wealth she owns—for gold we toss about
As merchandise, for gold we twist in chains,
What is it to the lumps of heavy gold
Stored hidden under river-beds, beneath
Fountains, the roots of crags?

Nor could she know
I shut her in my fort, no element
Around but the Dead Sea, that she might
gather
My vision on its glass, and dream my
dream—

A nest of phoenix not less full of life,
Of comforting, of cheer
Or perfume than to die with him she loves.
Salome, can she learn
That she must die with me, beside my
death,

That I must feel her drawing close to me,
To the same quiet, side by side? Salome,
I have such fear she of herself would rather,
I being dead, 'mid changes, far apart,
Spend all my wealth on some Mark Antony,
Some sharp-set prodigal of Rome . . .

[JOSEPH *opens the curtain and* MARIAMNE
enters, dressed in mourning.

But this . . .

Joseph, you lead our queen
Forth in this sombre, grave attire?

JOSEPH (*with deep obeisance*). Her pleasure ;

For when we told her of your sovereignty,
Swift as a heron she would speed to you.

[HEROD *dismisses SALOME and JOSEPH with
a wave of his hand; he looks long at
MARIAMNE for recognition; she gives
none.*

HEROD. So swift to draw to me, my bird . . .

Mariamne,

And you have journeyed day and night?

So far—

We come from very far . . . it startles us.

And you were so in haste you would not
stay

To robe you for your crown? Queen
Mariamne,

The kingdom of the Jews is thine—King
David

Wore of God's oil, thy fathers of their sword.

I have won it for you : it is all my bliss,

I am a king to you. No salutation?

But will you make me an idolater,

Thus kneeling to an image? Mariamne,

So to repulse! . . . Nor speech that is my
bread,

Nor any looks that feast me, nor those motions
Conscious with knowledge of my watching
eyes,

Nor any preparation of your beauty,
No forethought, nor misgiving. I forget—
You are born royal, and these added titles
Tease you contemptuous . . .

Lo, what is this?

You are weeping!

[He springs to her and kisses her repeatedly.]

MARIAMNE.

Stay!

HEROD.

Mariamne,

Think not to stay my kisses. By thy life . . .

MARIAMNE. My life! If you had not been here—

HEROD.

Thou mad one,

What hadst thou done?

Wouldst thou have loosed a blade and
smitten thee,

Should I have found thee earth-long in thy
blood?

MARIAMNE. No.

HEROD.

Thy wild words—

What were they?

MARIAMNE.

You commanded I should fall

As a brute victim at the sacrifice ;
Or, chained about your tomb, I had been
treated

As your camel or your horse, if you had died
While journeying from home.

HEROD. Eyes of the topazes!
What dream is this, what dream? Is it
because

I shut thee in Masada? I had fears,
My dove, I had such fears for thee, I shut
thee

Away as thou hadst not been living. Scarcely
I thought, save of the peril. At Masada
By the Dead Sea, and girt by sterile land,
I knew none could attain to ravish thee.
It was the haste—

It was the care—

You suffered?

Sick fancies haunted you? O sweet, but
queens

In jeopardy are often thus shut up—
Or underground, in towers, or over sea.
But you are fallen very white in hue.
Your health . . .

MARIAMNE. I have full health. I would not die,
I would not be cut off, and all my race
Cut off in me. It is not just my thread
Of life—there are so many! While I live
They live a little with me : they are warmed
A little of my blood : I comfort them.
You gave command to Joseph—

HEROD.

Ha!

MARIAMNE. He told me
You gave him that commandment, and he
swore—

*[He turns violently from her, drawing his
hands back.]*

HEROD. Could he have said it of himself alone?
Could he have dared so break his oath? My
silence—

Was it unsealed by him? He broke the seal,
He thawed the rigour, and, in little words
Of love and of caress, that have no meaning,
As in a fairy-tale he told my grief
Of how I loved so jealous? . . . and his oath
Floating before him as a wisp of straw
One laughs to follow as it floats along!
. . . He told her, and her lids dropt very deep,

And there were signs, and the deep flush,
my sign,

The quiet, growing rose as at the dusk . . .

[*Turning again and facing* MARIAMNE.

Mariamne, so you pleaded for your life,

And you prevailed. Will you not plead
with me ?

Will you not recollect and feign again

To me, your husband, with the words you
feigned,

The love you feigned to love . . . or was
the man

Beloved, who was your lover ?

[MARIAMNE *stands quite still.*

Is this pride ?

You are a Maccabee, an Israelite,

King Alexander's daughter—I of Edom,

Descended from a slave of Ascalon,

Not to be answered by your royal lips.

[MARIAMNE *sighs a little: then, raising
her eyes, speaks quietly.*

MARIAMNE. How was it drawn from him ?

As the night comes up into the evening-tide.

I was sad, and he was sorrowful to death

That he had sworn a cruelty and wrong
So unavailing to repent, if done.

Spare him, lord, in belief of my clear words.

[HEROD gazes at her with awe, then
muffles his face in his robe, and speaks
slowly.

HEROD. Were you so sad at dying, when to die
Was but to rise up at my bidding, *Come!*
Was but to quicken to my cry, *Receive me*
Back in your arms? Oh, you are slow of
heart!

When I was dying of the pest in Rome,
And knew not I should look upon you more,
Death was not cold, death glowed with
Mariamne.

I had prepared her welcome on that shore!

[*She flashes one rapid glance at him.*

MARIAMNE. I will wait you on that shore, my
lord the king.

HEROD (*dropping the folds of his mantle*). O
my gazelle, my noble distance-keeper,
Wilt thou indeed await me?

Then why tarry?

[*He strains her to his heart.*

MARIAMNE. But do not cast between us any
more

One that is dead. Spare Joseph, merciful!

HEROD. The dead between us, Mariamne?
Doe

Of the high places . . . How?

MARIAMNE. My grandfather . . .
[*He grips her wrist.*

(*In a whisper.*) My brother . . .

HEROD. Peace! Were you drowning in my
arms,

Your voice would sink before me so, your
thoughts

Would drop bewildered so . . .

MARIAMNE (*drawing back from him at arm's
length*). My grandfather—

My brother!

[*He watches her as if she were
working a spell.*

. . . I am ready for my death.

I have often dreamed it—death or sleep,
one pillow.

Why should I speak of the great ancestors?

You did not breathe their life. Why should

I speak,

Lord Herod, of my state

And purpose as your wife?

(*Hanging on his hand.*) Spare Joseph—
merciful!

HEROD (*still speaking gently, as he draws her closer*). Mariamne, I would reason with you.
Speak!

I would question the great blood in you : a
servant

False to his oath, a soldier in accord

With foes, a sentinel

Who to the nearing spy betrays the path—

Can such men live? Are they for kings
to use?

[*He has loosed her and she moves away,
looking out over the tombs of her ances-
tors. He follows.*

Flesh of their dust, pronounce: can such
men live?

ACT III

SCENE I

*Jericho: a court of palm-trees in the royal
pleasure-house*

CLEOPATRA, *dressed as the goddess Isis*,

HEROD *and* SELEUCUS

HEROD. Since you have now returned back
from Euphrates,

Leaving the Emperor to his wars, in duty

I have collected all my rents

From your Arabia, about Jericho,

And from the Eleutherian cities—all

The districts that I farm of you.

Seleucus!

Here are the papers.

Queen, the sums are here:

Twelve hundred talents; six from Araby,

Four from these cities, two from Jericho.

CLEOPATRA. No more from Jericho, with that
rare drug

Of native balsam, and such palms as gender
Huge, sable cones of fruit?

HEROD. The sum! I beg
For no deduction, though the locusts nipped
Our odorous gardens close, and scarcity
Has been upon the palm-yards from the greed
Of former and of latter flights in cloud
On every smooth wind of the sun-rising.

CLEOPATRA. Your husbandry is sad for me.
Seleucus,

Take these small payments to our purse.

Fie, Herod,

Fie! You are niggard in our revenues.

*[Exit SELEUCUS with the bags of gold
and papers.]*

HEROD. I bring you all the farms can yield.

CLEOPATRA. O Herod!

I saw you but this morning exercise
With spear and darts, as Greek Apollo chose
An Edomite to mask in. . . .

HEROD. Queen of Egypt,
I am a Jew of Babylonian race.

CLEOPATRA. Are you, bold, arrowing archer?

You so quick

Of motion, and quick-sighted at your game
Are now but blind. . . .

(*Close to his ear.*) We love you, king of
Jewry.

As yonder female clusters of the palm
Are bound with sprays of blossom for
achievement,

We would be yoked. So monarchs
Make open treaty.

HEROD. Tangling politician!

Ha, ha! A snare! Would you not win Judæa
Out of such wickedness, if I complied
With your own sort of pleasures? I have lost
These plains and cities that were mine: no
further

Will I renounce possession, nor will do
Despite to Mark Antonius, nor commit
Idolatry of Isis.

[*Wreathing the veil of the goddess round
her right arm, CLEOPATRA throws both her
arms back and laughs in HEROD'S face.
Enter ALEXAS.*

CLEOPATRA.

Ho, Alexas!

And with an onyx tablet—a love-letter
From over crowned Euphrates.

[*Exit* ALEXAS.]

Antony

Is liberal and kingly; what he lays
Before my eyes is legible on crystal,
A sheet of snowy crystal or bright onyx.

[*Lifting the tablet.*]

This is Arabian stone . . .

We will reply across the crowned Euphrates.

(To HEROD.) Good-bye some little while.

[*She puts her arms round his neck and
kisses him, then moves across the court,
rattling her scarabs, to the sound of
laughter so low it ends in a moan.*]

HEROD. A locust! . . . Would my hands could
beat her down!

SCENE II

Jericho: a room in the royal house

HEROD *is seated before a small council-table.*

SHIMAIAH, BABBAS, and NICHOLAS *are leaving him; then they halt, arrested by the despair of HEROD'S attitude.*

HEROD. Go from me,

Go, Nicholas, Shimaiah, Babbas—all!

BABBAS. Why should I go? I hold you in the right.

Cleopatra should be killed.

HEROD. You hurt the sorest,
Mourning with me a mighty deed undone.

BABBAS. I cannot see: why is it that you falter?

There was a quiet—some one at your ear . . .
And then your voice came husky, 'She shall live.'

My son, she must not live. . . . The murdereress

Of kindred . . . her young sister.

HEROD. And her brother

Cut off that she might rule. [*All are silent.*

BABBAS. She must not live.

She is the great Idolatress, she is

The centred spot of all corruption. Listen!

[*Turning to his companions.*

O Councillors, I listened :

Bear with me, for I know when voices travel

Beside an angel guiding them along.

King Herod summoned us, and spoke so greatly

Of the swift deed to do, my heart grew great.

For if our God

Commands us strictly to a deed, there is

No room for doubt or talk. [HEROD *looks up.*

This bitter plague

Of the whole world is in his power, to kill her,

And God has put the judgment in the king

To make an end.

NICHOLAS.

Rebuke me!

It is not that I fear the consequence
Of this rash deed: we are the Chosen
People,
And God can check the Roman armies as
He faltered Pharaoh's host . . . It is not
that—

She is his guest.

BABBAS.

By Jael's blow . . .

[He struggles with his rage.]

HEROD (*rising*). Nay, Babbas, I have promised
with an oath.

[Turning to his chief eunuch.]

See that the queen be richly served. To-day
It is her will—and as you lesson me
We must not check a guest—to-day, to-
gether,
We hunt wild asses . . .

Also any object

The queen of Egypt may desire—we all
Are tribute to her—pack upon her camels.
There, get you gone! *[Exeunt all.]*
This would have been the moment of my
life—

My spotted hero ridded of his plague,
And Jewry safe, and all my friendship clear.

*[He stretches himself wearily ; then looks
out and perceives CLEOPATRA.]*

Moving to Mariamne's tent ! . . .

The harlot put her arms about my neck :
If I could boast of this to Mariamne !

*[He shakes his head and turns away
abashed.]*

My dew, my breaking rose !

SCENE III

*A tent in the gardens of Jericho ; in the
midst an embroidery frame*

ALEXANDRA *enters, leaving the tent door
open at the back*

ALEXANDRA (*perceiving MARDIAN and another
eunuch at the tent door*). Mardian, and
you, his fellow, do you whisper ?
I have green purses in my robe. What news ?
Your Mistress Egypt couches with our
crown ?

MARDIAN. Alas, madam, she wonders if Cæsar's love were not a midnight dream; if young Pompey were not a vision of the sleep before waking; and if my lord Antony be not the delusion of noon—so uneffecting is her desire in Judæa. I think, madam, she means no good to Lord Herod, for she lies with her face between rolls, the matter whereof is pharmacy. . . . I hear her jewels as she moves her head. Sometimes she makes sounds such as we hear under the reeds in a full water. . . . I know their omen.

ALEXANDRA. Ha—sounds!

MARDIAN. But yet to-day the Lord Herod has given it out he hunts wild asses with her. . . . Gifts are come to her. We know not if the stony places may not persuade him—the stony places and the chase.

ALEXANDRA. Your queen?

MARDIAN. She is tiering and re-tiering her head: she who put on but one headdress for Cydnus must try twenty for a hunt of wild asses. She flings them to the wall and screams; her woman Charmian is pale as if

from hours of love with the exercise of this
fury.

ALEXANDRA. A purse for you—and you. Suck
up your news ;

See me again to-night after the chase.

[*They move apart, whispering.*

Judith !

[*MARIAMNE'S waiting-woman brings in silks
and begins to thread them on the
broidery-frame.*

(*In her ear.*) Your task ?

JUDITH. Madam, it is impossible I should do
your bidding, and observe the ways of the
Lady Cypros and the Lady Salome. My
mistress guards me by her, and she loves that
I should play the harp.

ALEXANDRA. A fool !

[*MARIAMNE approaches the tent.*

Judith, retire . . . and Mardian with you.

[*MARIAMNE bows low to ALEXANDRA, and
then embraces her. The servants leave
the tent.*

MARIAMNE.

Mother—

O mother, at your politics ! Sweet mother,

Why trouble with the ant-heap? You have
prayed me

To be a comfort to you ; let me comfort ;

Let me be to you as a child in age.

ALEXANDRA (*pushing back MARIAMNE'S arms*).

Child, Cleopatra puts you in the shade :

Better to see you in a sepulchre.

MARIAMNE (*caressingly*). Herod comes to me
in my tent each evening.

Mother, I have no fear of Cleopatra. . . .

ALEXANDRA. You have no fear! Child, child,
then you are fatal ;

O child, then you are dead : you ruin others,
And you are ruined ! Fear is as the homage
To Life. All mothers, from the wild fox-bitch
And nesting partridge even to her who bore
you,

Worship their joys with fear. When deadly
rumour

Of coming and death-belted thunder roves
The air, there is a trembling of all trees,
All creatures ; and a man who conquers,
conquers

His enemy behind the guard of fear.

It is the sovereign instinct, the sad wisdom
Fate whispers to the stars that fan our hearts ;
And if we know not fear our star is sunken.
Have fear ! or cease to rule, or cease to hope,
Or cease to live ; . . . you are become as death,
You are become the death of all you love.
This Cleopatra that you will not fear
Is pitied by your husband, and, relenting,
He hunts with her to-day.

O Mariamne,
Take power ! If I could see you
Like Esther on her throne, as excellent,
As savoursome, as subtle in conception
Of ways to spread her glory through the land,
It would avenge my wrongs !

MARIAMNE. Your son, your priest . . .

ALEXANDRA. My priest before Jehovah, my
fair priest !—

[*Holding MARIAMNE'S face in her hands.*
What would you be, what would you do,
what is it
That haunts you in the night-time ? What
delight
Would you make solid for me in the earth ?

MARIAMNE. Your pleasure, mother ;

Save that I will not plot against my
lord,

Save that I cannot fear Queen Cleopatra.

ALEXANDRA. Words fall from off your polished
head and slip

From off your polished gaze and leave you
changeless.

If Egypt rule your husband we are lost :

If you would rise and rule—

MARIAMNE. Mother, I rule him.

I have no fear. [*She sits down to her frame.*

ALEXANDRA. Fool! I could rend your
robe—

Nay, rend my own as at a funeral.

Oh, the stiff wing you raise against me,
proud!

A man's affections are not the whole
man:

He loved your brother—

[CYPROS and SALOME are seen approaching the tent.

Loves these alien women :

He is a son to one, to one a brother,

And he is of their sudden, savage race.

[CYPROS and SALOME enter with
effrontery.

Have you no greeting, madam, for the queen?

CYPROS. It is rather she who should bow down before me. Mariamne . . . (*taking up a corner of the embroidery*) Mariamne, my daughter-in-law . . . This is a fine stitch, Salome; this is a new stitch . . . Mariamne, and the woman my son has made queen! Pretty stitches. And look! our proud lady is broidering a crown with her silks.

ALEXANDRA. Woman, what is your business with the queen?

MARIAMNE. Mother, her business is with the stitchery. It is the only business on which we can confer with her. Lady Cypros, do not snatch the pattern. You may take the thing and copy it.

CYPROS. But Salome does not need to copy it. She has an eye . . .

MARIAMNE. Salome was ever a sempstress.

SALOME. Ever a sempstress! . . . Mariamne,

I have tidings for you. They concern your husband.

MARIAMNE. I am no politician. (*To CYPROS, who is snuffing a vase of perfume.*) Yes, that vase of rich unguents is a present from the Queen of Egypt.

CYPROS. How she honours you! And she, who is a real queen. (*To SALOME.*) Our perfumes have not this itch of the slime; our perfumes of Arabia are light and dry as the dust of the desert. This is wet; it lurks like the oil some animal secretes in the hidden caves of its body.

SALOME. Do not breathe it too heavily, Mariamne; it may be poisoned.

[MARIAMNE *rises and deeply snuffs the vase.*

MARIAMNE. You are right, Lady Cypros, this substance is very choice—yet familiar. Mother, is it not the same I remember when you returned from Egypt? You brought home seven vials.

CYPROS. Seven! do you hear, Salome?

[MARIAMNE *smiles.*

ALEXANDRA (*to SALOME*). You are careful of my daughter—you have tidings.

SALOME. It is a love-letter, madam, a love-letter—part of a love-letter! I would acquaint Mariamne with this parchment. I have stolen it; for though it is written to Antony, it is full of the praises of Herod. I may esteem such praises; but to a wife they may prove distasteful. (*Reads.*) ‘He is as a leopard, as a unicorn in his wildness; he pricks me to curiosity and to pursuit as a wild animal; and he is as remote: one must surprise him. Antony, will you hunt me this wild beast, will you draw him into subjection to my pleasure?’

[ALEXANDRA *opens her hands for the parchment*; SALOME, *closing her hands over it, goes up to MARIAMNE.*

You are no politician, and this is of no account.

[ALEXANDRA *glances at MARIAMNE, who remains silent. Old CYPROS, looking out, sees HEROD and CLEOPATRA pacing together.*

CYPROS. They are just of a height.

ALEXANDRA. Mariamne is taller than Cleopatra.

CYPROS. Mariamne is not taller than my son. Would you say that? Mariamne stoops forward when she walks. I have seen her between Herod and Salome as a gate between two towers.

[ALEXANDRA *motions to* MARIAMNE *to get up.*

MARIAMNE (*to* ALEXANDRA). I have looked down on the jewelled band of Cleopatra's head, when I was standing behind her. I have counted the jewels. There cannot be dispute.

[*She resumes her seat.*

CYPROS. Can there not, Beauty? (*To* ALEXANDRA.) It was not for her stature my son chose her; it was for her haughtiness.

MARIAMNE. Stand back, stand further off. You are in my light.

SALOME. You are speaking to my mother.

ALEXANDRA. She is angered for her mother.

MARIAMNE (*clutching at her broidery-frame as*

she rises). You shall be burnt as a witch ;
you are an idolater !

[CYPROS, *with a muttered imprecation, goes out, followed by SALOME, who turns at the door.*

SALOME. She worships incantations of the air,
And demons as they flash from evil eyes.
She knows there must be many gods—there
must ;
And but in jealousy you of Judæa
Proclaim there is one God . . . A little
nation,
It is a little people has one God ! . . .
The wise know well that there are many
gods,
Some from the exhalations in the stars,
Some from the chinks and crannies in the
flame,
Some from the rocks . . .

[*She stops affrighted.*

But if you say
She worships images, King Herod wor-
ships—
Has he not raised a temple to Apollo,

And one to Victory ; one to an image
Of a winged man, with wings on neck and
feet ?

Has he not raised a temple to the sun ?

[*She goes out breathless.* ALEXANDRA
passes her hand across her brow.

ALEXANDRA. Do you not see ? Has nothing
changed to you ?

Mariamne !

MARIAMNE. I dismissed the women, mother.
Leave me in peace !

ALEXANDRA. They must be all cast out.

SALOME (*returning*). Cast out ! Burnt as a
witch indeed ! But it is the king determines
our lives and our destiny, and the number of
our days must not exceed his own. Ay,
Mariamne ? His embrace, or the embrace
of death ? [She goes out.

[ALEXANDRA, after a long silence, moves to
the tent door, looks round, and returns to

MARIAMNE.

ALEXANDRA. They must be all exterminated ; vile
As Gentiles in the Temple—the whole race
Must be exterminated from the palace,

As Maccabees exterminate—cast out!
Your children in their place, your Alexander,
Aristobulus of the royal names . . .

[*Enter HEROD. He glances quickly at
ALEXANDRA, having caught the name
Aristobulus.*

My son, a grandam's babble!
HEROD (*to MARIAMNE*). Cleopatra
Is coming to your tent.
MARIAMNE. I will not see her.
HEROD. You will not see her? All your will
in this.

No further thought of her!

[*He turns toward ALEXANDRA, who makes
a gesture of despair toward MARIAMNE,
but smiles at HEROD, and withdraws.*

Beloved, I have a suit to you. My mother
Complains that you dismissed her.

MARIAMNE. Yes.

HEROD. Mariamne,
Her heart is fixed on me. In all my fortunes
She has been true.

MARIAMNE. Herod, I have a suit—
Banish your mother.

HEROD. Are these lips the same
That break in flower so freshly from the
cheek?

Are these clear eyes
Clear after such offence? Banish my
mother . . .

Banish the pyramids!

MARIAMNE. If they offended.

My lord is fond
Of clapping into desert fortresses
Those he professes dear. The Lady Cypros
Is irksome to me.

HEROD. Then she uttered truth :
She said you spoke to her with condescension.

MARIAMNE. There is Masada—let her harbour there.

HEROD. Masada—are you mad? It were her tomb!

(*With a low laugh.*) Besides,
One does not hide one's mother as a
jewel

That may be stole away.

You love your mother?

MARIAMNE. Have you paid Cleopatra all her
dues,

My subject-king?

HEROD. I am free of Cleopatra.

MARIAMNE (*laying her head on his bosom*). If
we might be a little to ourselves,

And keep our mothers locked in fortresses,

One north, one south.

Dear, it is irksome to me
To hear your mother loves you; it is irksome
To hear of you at all.

I would be silent
Concerning you at all times, for my mother
Hates you, and falls into vituperation;
I have to close my ears to her: your mother
Loves you with praise so fulsome, that again
I have to close my ears. I love you best.

[*She looks up; HEROD kisses her. Through
the tent door CLEOPATRA watches like a
stone sphinx.*

SCENE IV

The same as Act I., Scene I

CLEOPATRA *climbs up the steps to a higher terrace where SALOME is standing*

CLEOPATRA. Salome, how I love him! I am
parting

Sudden . . . for of this frenzy I shall die . . .

He must be loved back where he loves,
Salome,

Or his great heart will wither on its sands . . .

I am troubled for him ; he is deadly sick . . .

Princess, we must deliver him.

SALOME. Dear queen,
But can he be delivered?

CLEOPATRA. And for ever.

[*She whispers to SALOME, then continues vehemently.*

No, no!

We must not kill her—no!

But when she next offends him to the heart

So that he loathes her . . .

Oh, that we were walking
By Nilus' banks, with every instrument
Of bale beside us, bale in mud and beast,
Engulfing crocodile or asp that sucks,
Asp or the armèd basilisk! My Egypt! . . .
She must be found conspiring in her hatred
To take his life, in her possession venoms
From Egypt . . . and himself shall strike
her dead.

But we must keep our passion in the dark,
And smile upon it to ourselves,
As on those gems that lustre in the dark.

SALOME. But how?

CLEOPATRA. Salome, as migrating birds
Arrive, as Nilus swells, you will receive
Of me your vengeance: it will overwhelm.

SALOME (*in terror*). You love my brother,
Cleopatra, love him?

CLEOPATRA. He must be loved back where he
loves, Salome.

(*Faintly.*) He is coming through the trees.
He is beloved.

SALOME. No, not my brother, queen—
It is the Asmonean Alexandra

Who creeps down to the bathing-tanks
alone.

CLEOPATRA. Leave me ; I have a word for her ;
and kiss me,

For I am bent on Mariamne's death.

[*They kiss.*

SALOME. But let me bring you to the water.

CLEOPATRA.

No.

[*SALOME climbs out of sight. CLEOPATRA
redescends to where ALEXANDRA, who
has entered by the side of the tank, stands
above the water, her arms crossed before
her eyes.*

ALEXANDRA (*turning*). You could not watch
down there to find the face

Of a dead child. You could not guard your
patience.

CLEOPATRA (*sliding an arm round ALEXANDRA's
shoulders*). Gaze steadily, gaze down !

King Herod's face is washing with the reeds.

ALEXANDRA. You are King Herod's guest :
your Anthony,

O Cleopatra,

Has pardoned Herod. How shall I believe?

CLEOPATRA. There is within my blood such
vast abhorrence

For him who killed your child, he interrupts
My further dreams, he shakes me in my sleep
As if I had a conscience. Alexandra,
By Nilus he shall die!

ALEXANDRA. Has he offended?

You have been very slow in taking ven-
geance.

CLEOPATRA. My soul is fastened on this deed.

Now kiss me,
For I am bent upon King Herod's death.

[ALEXANDRA *receives her kiss coldly.*

You misconceive; you should not miscon-
ceive.

We have these level natures, you and I,
Of grounded politicians; when we smile,
The honey is not of the honeycomb.

Friend, listen to your steersmate! Seize
the courts

And the high turrets of Jerusalem
When Antony shall strike, and in the name
Of the Maccabeans; then

Let, as of yore, Judæa lie at rest

On Egypt's old protection. You had given
Your son into my breast that I might rear
him,

As Egypt's Princess reared the Jewish babe.
It might not be. . . . Your daughter is
foundation,

When this false corner-stone, this Edomite
Is shattered, for a kingdom of the Jews,
As sweet as aspalathus to our hearts.

(In a softer voice.) Keep her, then, bitter
with the tyranny

She bears from this injurious, winding
stranger,

Whom all Jews hate ; whom you, my Alex-
andra,

And I determine ill against, as surely
As goddesses hate from their potent altars.

ALEXANDRA *(suddenly, in a broken voice)*. I need
you, Cleopatra . . .

My hopes are dying . . . Mariamne blind,
Stubborn of soul, impolitic . . . My days

Are as a prisoner's ; every day a cell

Her husband keeps the key of : I am
watched.

CLEOPATRA (*tenderly*). Your hand . . . for I
must lead you from this water
That moves a little and exaggerates
What comes up through the water.

Ah, these balm-yards
Of Galahad—enchanted Jericho!
Are not my hands
Sweet with the sweet plants of the balustrade?
Smell them! See yonder
A horseman in a whirl-blast of white dust.
Who is it? He is carried like a god
By clouds . . .

ALEXANDRA. It is that murderer.

CLEOPATRA. Not so!
His floating mantle fills the solitude.
It is some other . . .

[*She moves away, then turns back to*

ALEXANDRA, *looking beyond her.*

Pace!

[*They ascend the terraces.*

ACT IV

SCENE I

In front of the king's house, Jerusalem.

HEROD, *seated on a rock, overlooks the city and the Holy Mount.* BLIND BABBAS stands beside him, moving his hands in the air.

BABBAS. What do you see?

HEROD (*anxiously*). It is not here . . .

My noblest monument.

BABBAS. What do you see,
And what is stretched before your eyes?
The Temple? . . .

Look at it, look up to the little House
Of God. . . . That day you stormed Jeru-
salem

You spared the Temple, much as you
spared me,

Blinding my eyes . . . God's House—and
I am glad

I cannot see it—so you spared my eyes.

You face our ruined Temple—what beyond?

HEROD. The Amphitheatre. . . . But it is not
here—

My greatest work! . . .

Could you but see! It is the distant spikes,
The turrets and the rising fortresses.

It is not here—my noblest work.

BABBAS. Beyond
The Amphitheatre? . . .

HEROD. It is yet to build.

I can see far beyond, and overarching
This petty House of God, as in mirage,
And gleaming in the air, a perfect Temple,
Costly as Solomon's. It glitters on me
With every sunset, white and glittering. . . .

[*He weeps.*]

And yet I may not enter the fair Courts. . . .

A stranger, grape by grape,

I have enriched the golden vine that hangs
Colossal on the porch. . . .

I may not enter the fair Courts. I am

An Edomite, a stranger, and rejected.

If God would love me . . .

If God would set His heart on me ! I build

Wherever I am loved a monument :

And I am filled as is the moon at full,

My whole heart in this vision. . . . Every-
where

It is myself, and where it most excels,

And where I have devised the mystery,

I may not look close on my God. Is this

A sorrow to you with your open lids ?

BABBAS. I mourn indeed there is no royal
priest . . .

Without a blemish . . . beautiful. The Temple

His own to enter, and he has no place !

[HEROD *stands with fixed eyes.*

HEROD. There is no royal priest . . .

And I can never serve as priest. I mourn.

BABBAS (*gently*). My son, I see your Temple.

It shall rise ;

You give me fresher sight.

[*He lays his hand over HEROD'S.*

What hurries you ?

Your skin grows tense. What is it ?

HEROD. Past that rock
A single horseman . . . no, a band of horse . . .
But one in front more urgent at the gate.
They have dismounted.

BABBAS. Leave me then in darkness.
Descend!

HEROD (*who has moved forward, turns back to the old man*). We will abide these tidings.

[*He seats BABBAS on a ledge, then strains downward towards the rocky path of ascent.*

Pheroras!

[*He embraces his brother, who climbs to him.*

Ho, Pheroras, your face. . . .

BABBAS (*groping toward PHERORAS*). Speak!

HEROD (*beating his breast*). Not too sudden.

BABBAS. Speak!

PHERORAS. Antony is dead.

HEROD. Mark Antony! . . .

[*He rends his garment.*

But I can see him, comfortable, lusty,
And all to-morrow his. But I can hear
him,

The hearty, rallying tones . . . Mark Antony! . . .

A voice that had grown soft on woman's love.
PHERORAS (*nodding his head*). She died with him.

HEROD.

Of herself chose to die?

[PHERORAS *nods again*.

Then Antony

Gave no commands . . . and yet her majesty

She knew was in this action. Antony

And Cleopatra—star on star extinct. . . .

They will be buried as one king for ever;

And Antony's great error proved the truth.

Why are you waiting round? There is no more.

These Romans, ah! these fellow-kings, these men

Whose breath is on one's cheek, whose eyes are level,

Who are as gods, who do not lift one up. . . .

PHERORAS (*shrugging his shoulders*). There is no more? We are as fishes cast

Out of their element on the hot banks,

And like to die . . .

Mark Antony, who crowned you, in the dust,
And Cæsar . . .

HEROD. True!

You speak the truth : I must go straight to
Rome,

To Cæsar . . . I will wear my diadem
Till Rhodes ; then go bareheaded, but with
state,

To Cæsar.

(*Suddenly to PHERORAS.*) Break the news to
Mariamne. [*Exit PHERORAS.*]

(*To SOHEMUS, who, having climbed up, has
waited behind PHERORAS.*) Sohemus,
lead this old man down the rocks.

When he is safe, return.

[*Exit SOHEMUS, guiding BABBAS.*]

BABBAS (*as he disappears*). We grope about—
Eyes have we and we see not ; all of us
Are groping on the earth !

HEROD (*calling*). Return !

And I must give commands . . . for now
my death

Is moving on, is moving down to me,

As sure as an approaching caravan.
Cæsar will kill me ; it is now my end ;
And looking down on Pheroras, I see him
As a black messenger
With tidings of my death to Mariamne,
With tidings of her death, for she must
be

Beside me where I am, and ghost to ghost.
The solitude of the new elements
Were base without her. I should have no
voice—

All quenched, drowned . . .

(With a sudden cry.) Mariamne !

O echo, O sure answer back from all

The hills she loves ! . . .

How the earth dotes on her ! how the sun
follows

Her path to dote on her ! how her own youth
Desires her ! how her blood

Wooes her as for itself ! . . .

To check the changes,
Season on season, of my apple flower . . .

To snap the branch ! . . .

I'll move from her in secret : I am bearing

Her life away. Should I not move in secret?

[*He turns, hearing a sound, to speak with*
SOHEMUS, and faces MARIAMNE and her
sons.

MARIAMNE (*presenting her sons*). These—

For your blessing and farewell.

HEROD (*thrusting the children away*). Is it
because

You cannot say farewell?

Or is it you are haunted for my face?

MARIAMNE. My lord,

You have sent Pheroras with solemn tidings :

He says that you will journey to your death.

HEROD. Mariamne, but your face is grave—a
sky

Woven throughout without a seam. What
terror

Is in your heart?

MARIAMNE. No terror.

HEROD. And if Cæsar

Torment and kill me—ah, indifferent

As a lotus-flower washed by a bloody current,

Indifferent to my death!

MARIAMNE. Farewell, my lord ;

I did but climb the hill to say farewell,
Putting these first that I might be the last.

[She kisses him.]

HEROD. Cold hands, cold cheeks! Have you
heard, Mariamne,
How Cleopatra is at last in peace
Entombed with Antony?

MARIAMNE. Your sons, my lord—
These little ones . . . Your blessing and
farewell.

HEROD (*blankly staring at her*). What will
you think of, child, when I am gone?
Will you be mourning for me? Will you
make
Such twilight as should fall before the night?
Speak but a little. . . .

Shall I go to Rome?

Can we thus sever? Speak!

MARIAMNE. But were I Cæsar should I plot
your death?—

I could not, Herod. It may be he loves
you,

And cannot of a sudden, seeing you
So lusty in your kingship and so full

Of joy in all your days, put you to death.

Cæsar, be pitiful!

HEROD.

No, no :

You will have tidings of my death.—Begone!

This is too sharp that you so prize your
life,

Your life without my love. Where are you
passing ?

What is there for you in my absence?—

Rancour

And all malignity and sullen pangs. . . .

MARIAMNE (*as if dazed*). Will you be long away?

HEROD.

Would you were dead!

And from your eyes you wish it back. This
face

You leave me with to set up at my prow,

This till I die! Farewell!

[*He leaps down the rock.*]

MARIAMNE.

A murderer!

[*Instinctively she turns to her children and
covers them with her hands and kisses
them.*]

(*To SOHEMUS, who ascends.*) The king
breaks from us suddenly; his children

Be in your charge. There, take them,
Sohemus!

SCENE II

Masada. MARIAMNE'S old apartment

SALOME *and* CYPROS

SALOME. Mother, I am angered against Herod.

CYPROS. It is my son's will, child. He besought me with the same eyes he lifted for a favour when he was small; he was weeping.

SALOME. He has banished us to his Masada; we are his captives now.

CYPROS (*laying a soothing hand on SALOME*).
My son has commanded. Let us lie by, like the garments he is not using.

[*In a low chant to herself.*

Void we are as the palace that he frequents
not,

Void . . . but how sudden an outbreak of
gems and colour!

Say, can there be a woman so girt with gladness?

Cypros, safe from his foes thou shalt clasp thy son!

SALOME. Mother, mother, but you are free in your thoughts!

[*A eunuch comes and addresses SALOME.*
(*To CYPROS.*) From Egypt; the message is not from Rome.

CYPROS. Egypt is no land . . . he does not even travel by Egypt. You may talk Egyptian while I am singing to myself.

[*She is heard as she goes away.*

Great is he, undiverted, cruel to torture,

Wrenching the truth from his tortured; soft to my bosom,

Soft to the cries of my bosom as when he sucked.

[*Meanwhile an Egyptian woman has entered. She salutes SALOME, then presents her with a box.*

SALOME. Who art thou?

ANAKE. Charmian's sister.

SALOME. And thine errand ?

ANAKE (*pointing to the box now in SALOME'S bosom*). I am Anake . . . Charmian is dead.

My sister Charmian ! She, too, touched poison.

They say it is the same.

[*She points again toward the box.*

I am Anake ;

I tended Cleopatra in the tombs.

SALOME. How fared she there ? She wept for Antony ?

ANAKE. She wandered up and down and took no rest,

And then she spread her prayers upon the tomb ;

And it was like the lion round the desert

To hear her—I was frightened, for the noise

Was never in one place—now near, now far.

. . . My sister Charmian gave this to my bosom. [*She bows and turns to go.*

SALOME (*detaining her*). Anake, you have looked upon her dead.

How did those wonderful and perfumed lips
Fall into silence? Was her splendour slow
In ebbing, as a sunset or the sea?

ANAKE. O Princess, she was marvellous dis-
figured,

For all the fair array she had put on
To dazzle Cæsar when he should be
brought.

Her eyes were sunk far back into her head,
For she had wept so sore; her cheeks were
cut

And frayed up with her nails, as I had seen
her

Striding her chamber when the fury drove.

SALOME. For Antony—was this for Antony?

Then wherefore was she careful of her
promise?

Why does she crave the death of Mariamne?

[*Holding the golden box before her eyes.*

It may be there is poison here for both,
For Herod too . . . He shut us in this
fortress;

It may be he is whispering our death . . .

But she shall die the first. If I remove her,

And put her beauty from his eyes, perchance . . .

There is but one delight—to live with him
Again and sole as in our youth together.

*[A great cry is heard through the passage,
followed by wailing. Enter PHERORAS
and CYPROS with a crowd of attendants.]*

PERORAS. Salome, evil tidings.

CYPROS. He is dead!

Herod is dead.

*[She falls, as if shot. SALOME with a
sharp cry lays hold of PERORAS.]*

PERORAS. They are come from Rome, just
landed. . . . They report

That Cæsar tortured him.

SALOME (*looking down at CYPROS*). She has
not heard!

[She stoops down and chafes her mother.]

PERORAS. Killed in revenge, by Cæsar.

SALOME. Pheroras,

You are as in his place—our Governor.

Swift to Jerusalem! Leave us alone.

Put out the women. Swift!

SCENE III

Shipboard. HEROD and NICHOLAS of Damascus
at the stern of the vessel

NICHOLAS. Dear king, but why so fervid in
your gaze,
And why this backward strain? The land
is Greece.

HEROD. The land is Greece—your land, philo-
sopher,

Your race, all people's race, the land of
gods. [NICHOLAS moves away sternly.

These coasts!

NICHOLAS (*passing the king as he paces*). We
land by Strato's Tower, the earth
Still Greek, idolater!

[*He passes down the deck and becomes
involved in talk with a group of sea-
men.*

HEROD. The earth still Greek!
Then I will build on it, adorn it. Temples,
There shall be Temples;—ay,

And the great stronghold, Cæsar's fort.

[*He falls into deep musing.*

Mariamne—

Her Tower . . . O Mariamne! it is childish
The love I bear her, inexpressible.

Mariamne! In my palace she will greet
me,

At my palace door; or rather she will stand
And wait for my approach still as a flower.

Children should run to greet you; but a
woman

Should wait upon your coming as a flower.

[*Presently NICHOLAS returns.*

NICHOLAS. King, you must rouse yourself.

HEROD. Not from my dream.

[*At sight of NICHOLAS's face.*

Good Nicholas—

What is the peril? Brief!

NICHOLAS. There is report

Throughout Judæa, and, it seems, through
Egypt,

That you are dead. Those clustered
foreigners,

Taken aboard to speed our ship, confer,

In the confusion of their dialects,
Of how King Herod has been killed and all
His lands in turbulence . . .

[HEROD *suddenly shrieks and tears
his hair.*

NICHOLAS. What ails the king?

SAILORS. What sickness?

HEROD (*to the SAILORS*). Swift!

Swift, if you love me . . . I have in-
timation,

I have seen it as a spectre from the sea,
The queen is dead!

Swift! she is calling me . . .

[*He stares blankly to sea, while NICHOLAS
encourages the SAILORS.*

SAILORS. King Herod, we will bring him to
the haven!

SCENE IV

Alexandrium: a room of the royal fortress

Enter to SOHEMUS, MARIAMNE

MARIAMNE. I would ride forth to-day.

[*Perceiving that SOHEMUS gives no heed.*

Prepare me

A cohort of fair camels.

SOHEMUS (*bowing*). I am your slave.

MARIAMNE. Say rather

You are my jailer, for you do not stir.

SOHEMUS (*bowing again*). I am your slave—do
with me what you will.

[*He goes on pacing; MARIAMNE stands
by the window and sighs.*

MARIAMNE (*with a gesture of entreaty to SO-
HEMUS as he passes*). The air!

SOHEMUS. I cannot, queen; my lord's com-
mands! [*He moves past her.*

MARIAMNE. Leave off your pacing—

Sohemus, let me pace. Cease! I am weary

Of watching you so harsh against the
walls ;

As I should watch a spider drop his web,
And up again, for ever to and fro.

[*Meeting SOHEMUS'S eyes as she rises
and prepares to pace.*

Why am I here ?

SOHEMUS.

Look in my shield.

[*Lifting it.*

MARIAMNE (*closing her eyes*).

He never

Can be so hated as I hate him. Sorrow

It is that I have looked upon his face.

SOHEMUS. And would you look upon his face
no more ?

[*She hesitates.*

MARIAMNE. O that his life were in my very
hands !

[*SOHEMUS stands before her.*

SOHEMUS. Madam, there is report your lord is
dead.

MARIAMNE. Ay—but a vague report spread
through the lands,

Carried by pilgrims, wrought into a tale,

To cover up the people in such darkness,

That their great king is dead. You are
not weeping ?

SOHEMUS. It is report, and yet so vehement
His mother at Masada mourns his death ;
His sister takes the news ; and for the
manner,
Report says he was tortured and then
killed.

MARIAMNE. Has Cæsar dared to kill him, and
is Jewry
Treated so abject ? Oh, a Maccabee,
And not to take revenge !

SOHEMUS. But the sure message
Delays—a mere report, spread from the sea
To murmuring Cæsarea. Were it sure . . .
[He is close on her, face to face.
I have command to kill you . . .

My reward,—
If I shall spare your life ?

Enter QUEEN ALEXANDRA

ALEXANDRA. Stay, Sohemus !
Sohemus, spare my child ! . . .

*[She pushes MARIAMNE at arm's length
from SOHEMUS and stands between them
looking back at him.*

My Jewish soldier—and the fierce command
Laid on you is a Gentile's!

Sohemus,

I and this slender queen before you are
The last of Judas Maccabeus left,
He that delivered Jewry from the stranger.
I loose you from strange bondage! The
Lord God

Looses His servant from abomination
Of oath to Esau's offspring: the Lord God
Blessed Jacob the Beguiler. Spare my
child,

My beauty of the Asmoneans—spare her!

MARIAMNE. He will not kill us;

Mother, there is no fear; we are as safe
As the nesting cranes.

SOHEMUS. But my reward for this?

ALEXANDRA. Oh, excellent! A prize! You
save her life . . .

Behold her beautiful. Oh, is she not
A living tree of flower before our eyes,
A living strength with living ornament
Of lips and cheek and open gaze, and brow
Of a flowered myrtle? Now she is my own;

Now she is mine again I grasp her, almost
To lift her as my son to sovereignty.
See how she pines for freedom—she is
snuffing

The air . . . her nostrils! She is born again
To breath, to draw it as a right and feel it
Ungrudged to her young bosom.

(*Clasping* MARIAMNE.) Once again
I give her to the air, my Mariamne.
No more disquiet! Ah, true, loyal soldier,
Though in her eyes there was no fear, there
floated

That in their sadness the wild creatures
show—

A daydream of their end . . . I have often
thought

She would be happier to die—my child,
Who coldly met each day as though her last :
She of the blessing and the birthright, he
Of the surrendered blessing, the lost birth-
right ;

She of great lineage, so slavish his ;
So miserable, of his cruelty,
Her race, the kings Antigonus, Hyrcanus,

And the lovely young High Priest, your
prince, her brother.

(*To MARIAMNE.*) Do not speak, Mariamne!
Breathe on your gratitude, breathe peace-
fully.

[*MARIAMNE moves slowly away and looks
out over the tombs.*]

My daughter is no politician. Ever
She loved the dead, and now will love her
husband.

Let her consume her comeliness with ashes
While we devise for her a happy kingdom!
Sohemus, hasten! Seize the courts and
towers

And gateways of Jerusalem. Make speed!
Sohemus, in your life as in our lives,
The moment of our fate has quickened:
Fate

Bears but few living children. Sohemus,
Make speed!

SOHEMUS. It is not you that can reward
me:

Your daughter . . .

Madam, I must have her oath.

ALEXANDRA. Her oath—my oath! I swear
she shall be yours,
Here in my palace. On King Herod's
sword . . .

[MARIAMNE comes down toward them and
speaks as from a dream.

MARIAMNE. First tortured, and then killed!

ALEXANDRA. Ay, child. Receive it!

Tortured in Rome, the city of his triumph,
Tortured among the people of his love,
Tortured at Cæsar's will, whom he has
vaunted

Worthy as God of Temple-worship, homage
Of incense.

MARIAMNE. But he does not suffer now.

He is at peace.

ALEXANDRA. In bottomless Gehenna!

(To SOHEMUS.) And you are very sure of
this report?

SOHEMUS. Madam, it is so current in men's ears,
That if my lord return my life is forfeit,
Save for your intervention, or his coming
With a maimed power or sovereignty from
Rome.

ALEXANDRA. My child is saved, and if she be
a widow

She will herself reward you. Sohemus,
Think! I have lost my son . . .

(*To MARIAMNE.*) No, do not touch me—
A fang is in your touch—you cannot comfort ;
A man alone can comfort me, a man
Who will avenge me for my son.

(*To MARIAMNE.*) Be silent !
You have neither mouth nor wisdom.

Sohemus,

If this report be insubstantial, if
He be not dead, why then, he shall be
dead :

As the days make themselves, his doom be
made.

Meantime there must be great festivity,
Pomps, dazzling courtesies, and Mariamne
Even more desirable than kingdoms.

[*MARIAMNE makes a protesting motion.*

Child,

And will you not dissemble, sacrifice
Your virtue?—the one victim we can
spare,

Bred to be sacrificed ; a prince's virtue,
Therefore to be esteemed.

(*With sudden passion.*) Consider, child,
All I have done . . .

[*A Gatekeeper rushes in.*

GATEKEEPER. The king! . . . The king is at
the fortress-doors. [*He rushes out.*

ALEXANDRA (*crossing to SOHEMUS*). Then we
are doomed—

The faithful wife will now betray her mother,
Betray you, the preserver of her breath.

[*Suddenly returning, she kneels to*

MARIAMNE.

But, daughter, you have found it sweet to
live ;

You have set your life before aught else :
have mercy !

Do not destroy your mother. Let me live !

SOHEMUS (*kissing an end of her robe*). Queen
Mariamne,

My life is in your hands, you may take my
life.

MARIAMNE. Bring in the king straight to me
as I am.

Leave me, but take my mother to her women.

[*Exit* SOHEMUS *with* QUEEN ALEXANDRA.

Enter HEROD *on the other side, his hair disordered and flying.*

HEROD. Mariamne!—But you are well—

[*He kneels, holding her hands in his own, sobbing. Then he rises and tries to recollect himself.*

You might have aged, you might have lost your beauty—

It harried me—you might have lost your health.

I have thought of all the chances . . . all the fears,

The apprehensions that have startled me,
Lacking you in my sight. My startled sleep

Has been the watching of your ghosts. . . .
Not one,

Ghosts in succession, ghosts of Mariamne.

I laugh now . . . laugh with me! Should we not laugh? . . .

The rose upon your cheek, that rose profound

In its abateless damask, not a flush,
Not deepening for me, steady as the stain
Dyed in a mummy's face-cloth . . . is it
welcome ?

But you are safe, and every idol-god
Shall have reward for this. . . .

Look at me, love ; I live,

I am returned to you, I am well with Cæsar.

[She groans.]

MARIAMNE. What should that be to me ?

[She falls to the ground.]

HEROD. Surely she would not dare to do this
thing !

She is playing with a harsh,
A cruel instrument of war, an engine
That will cut her all to pieces ! We must
warn her,

We must instruct her.

[He goes to her prostrate on the ground.]

Mariamne,

Mariamne, you are ill-prepared !

You do not yet receive me as you must.

. . . Have pity on yourself,
For if you do not plead with me, my
Dead . . .

Have pity! . . . Are you grown so ignorant,
And all I am forgot? . . . I am well with
Cæsar;

But if you have been gloating on my death,
Let me whisper in your ear—it is a counsel,
A friendly counsel—you must make pre-
tence;

You must get up from off your knees, and
grieve

That you are not attired in majesty,
Giving me to excuse the wrong, such rich-
ness

And fragrance of you in your lips and eyes,
Such flash of jewels loitering into bloom
As I behold you . . . and the voice
Of the fountain as it leaps in all your speech,
Of the fountain breaking from the rocks . . .

Dissemble! . . .

You have a cause against me, a complaint?
Behold me, I am in the judgment-seat.

I will hear your wrongs. [*He seats himself.*]

MARIAMNE. Not that—it is not that. . . .

I would warn you; there I would not fail in
duty:

My mother—

My mother—she would hurt. . . .

She shall not hurt you;

Remove her from me. I would have no
harm

To happen to you. She would do you hurt!

[*She kneels, and rubs her head against*

HEROD'S garments.

HEROD. You love me? Say you love me
with that cry.

MARIAMNE. Pull down your hair. . . . Fie, it
is braided false!

Who taught you this in Rome?

What crinkled hair!

[*She rebraids a tress.*

HEROD. Cleopatra would have taught me this.

[*MARIAMNE smiles.*

MARIAMNE.

My Arab

Is fairer than her Roman. How the sea

Is in your hair! And you were nearly
wrecked?

. . . Remember, I have warned you there
are many
Waiting about your throne to do you harm,
My mother chief. . . .

Now speak to me of Rome.

HEROD (*taking her on his knee*). But, Mari-
amne, I have brought you gifts—

A Tyrian robe. . . .

There was a Cosian thing, a robe, a veil
Augustus chose. . . .

[*Setting her free again, he goes impetuously
to the door and gives a command.*]

MARIAMNE (*as he returns*). And did you
choose it too,

This Cosian robe?

HEROD. The tissue was by far
The more esteemed—too fine to catch the
eye.

I hesitated long, and then . . .

[*An ample and heavy stole of Tyrian is
brought in.*]

O Mariamne, will you wear this robe?

MARIAMNE. There, let it be! Now tell me of
Augustus,

For I would hear of every circumstance
About your life to guard you.

HEROD.

Rome !

Is it your fashion to inquire of Rome
While I am feeling for your breath, so close
I listen, and so fine ? Enfold me—no,
Leave me ! . . . I am ashamed.

*[He sits down, buries his face in his hands,
and groans ; MARIAMNE walks out,
leaving the straight robe before him.]*

ACT V

SCENE I

Later. HEROD'S *bedchamber.* NICHOLAS
has been reading to him

HEROD. Tie up your scroll. . . . The nettling
dog-star reigns.

I am hot; I am distraught. . . .

The cactus-flowers
And roses! All one's life would fain lie out
Open as theirs. . . . [*Exit* NICHOLAS.

Now tell me, Sohemus,
Did the queen speak of me?

SOHEMUS. She is always silent.

HEROD. Of me—and was she silent of all else?

SOHEMUS. Save of her captive breath. She
longed for motion

And air in her captivity.

HEROD. And never

She looked upon my portrait?

SOHEMUS.

Once.

Bent forward from the waist, her neck out-
stretched,

Her hands bound back, she gazed on you ; I
passed

And I repassed the door ; she did not
move.

HEROD. Send me Bagoas. Wake him if he
sleep.

SOHEMUS. My lord . . .

HEROD. What, you demur ? Send me Bagoas.

[*Exit* SOHEMUS.

Now in a ball of light she would approach
me,

And in the levelness of light be mine.

She must come, nor dissemble with me
more.

Enter BAGOAS

Bagoas, rouse your mistress, I would see
her.

BAGOAS. But she is laid asleep,
No day-dress girded on, the winnowing
Of fans above her—

HEROD. She is strewn with musk?

BAGOAS. It is a most sweet sleep.

HEROD. Bid her awake!

BAGOAS. My lord!—

HEROD. Bid her come forth to me!

BAGOAS. My lord!—

HEROD. Well, eunuch?

BAGOAS. I dare not wake the queen and stay
the fans.

Her anger—the impertinence. . . .

HEROD. Go out ;
Tell her she is commanded by her husband
band

To come to him.

BAGOAS. O my lord!—

HEROD. Tell her, further,
To wake her will at need, he is the king,
And by twofold obedience she must come.
But, fellow, do not look distractedly.
Wake her with dove-wing touches ; do not
scatter

The bountiful moments of her sleep. No
harshness!

Nothing but this—that she must come to me.

BAGOAS. My lord!—

HEROD. Go, do your office.

[*Exit* BAGOAS.]

If she should disobey, the noon were
not,

And the eternal opposite of noon
Fixed as a destiny. . . .

But she lies wide,
Musk-strewn—asleep. The great mansue-
tude!

Sleep is so warm,
So affable. . . . Do the dark bow-strings
curve,

Strained at my summons wide to let fly
passion

That the smooth hour is ended? Does she
waken

Her lids, her flashing eyes? But she will
come!

I wait to very pain; a gold confusion
Of many sunbeams takes away the sun.
Silence—but out of it some fuller spirit
Is ready. . . . Silence—no! Along the
marble

A shuffling on of slippers. . . . Not Bagoas!

[Rising from his couch.

MARIAMNE—blessed! Thou art come.

[She stands at the door in girded dress and veil.

MARIAMNE. You sent at noon for me and broke repose.

Is it ill news, or worse—that you are ill?

HEROD. I wanted you——

MARIAMNE. My lord, you have awaked me.

What was your cause?

HEROD. Bagoas waked you gently?

I wanted you——

One of your cheeks is blowing
Sleep's own red rose.

Come to my couch, beloved.

MARIAMNE. I will not.

HEROD. Ha!—defy me?

The sun could scorch up any life outside . . .

And you are witless with your slumber still.

Are you not mine? Am I not burning here

Awake? I was awake while you have
slept. . . .

I could not bear it longer—very pain!

Have mercy on me, solace! Yea, have
mercy!

Earth and the secret hour are but one flame—

We are enwrapt. . . .

Heed me, I say—give heed!

MARIAMNE. How dared you send for me, your
royal queen,

And from among my women—as a slave!

HEROD. If you are queen, of me

The title names you, being my wife. Re-
member,

Woman—there is the breaking-up of ties,

There are writings of divorce, and there are
deaths

For treason to be suffered—violence,
thunders

And lightnings that enthrall you in their
actions

To the quick of their own ravage—

MARIAMNE.

But I fear

None of these ills, nor you.

HEROD (*grasping her veil*). Am I your husband?

Am I your king?

MARIAMNE. Loose me! Not now!—A slave,
Bred of the servant Esau. Let me loose!

[*She yields her veil to his hand and moves away swiftly. He stands as if stunned; then beats his head against the column of the door.*]

HEROD. Her veil! [*A young Eunuch enters.*
Send in my cupbearer with well-cooled
wine. [*Exit the Eunuch.*

[*HEROD drops on his couch.*

Oh, the void nothing, oh, the dust of flesh—
Arrows upon the ground!

Enter his Cupbearer

My boy, a draught.

Why do you fumble? Taste the wine.

CUPBEARER. I drink it.

I dare to drink what I have mixed myself.

But, king, I have a potion that the queen

Gave me, and called in the Aramaic tongue

A love-charm: 'tis for you.

HEROD. For me, a love-charm!

No, reptile—no!

CUPBEARER. A potion that she called

A love-charm in the Aramaic tongue.

HEROD. The wife-adult'ress, who would be a
widow,

Calls her snake-venoms in Egyptian phials
Love-charms! . . . You dare not drink, con-
ceiving aspic

Is in the nectar? Bid my Gaulish guard
Seize old Bagoas: we will hear as strictly
As rack can tell of this attempt. Bagoas
Must be delivered to the torturer
For our swift satisfaction. Every door
Of the women's quarters bid the soldiers
seize,

Treading with secrecy, their weapons loos-
ened,

Before the march, from sheath. Bid Sohemus
Attend me—and the Princess
Salome and the Tetrarch Pheroras.

[*Exit* Cupbearer.

Will not this strike my chains apart?

(*Suddenly breaking into sobs.*) Forsaken,

Betrayed, condemned . . . Terrible wilder-
ness! [He weeps long.]

Re-enter SOHEMUS

SOHEMUS. My lord—

HEROD. You have heard?

SOHEMUS. The queen—
the queen is true.

She is not one to deal with sorcery :

She is plain in action, and when still is safe.

HEROD. You guarded her, while I was far
away,

And all her hours were frank—you hold her
true?

Enter SALOME and PHERORAS

SALOME. O brother! . . .

HEROD (*putting his hand in hers*). Hush,
Salome! Sohemus

Is praising my fair culprit.

PERORAS. Sohemus!

Brother, but Sohemus himself is charged

In this attempt.

SOHEMUS. No!

PHERORAS.

On Bagoas' oath.

Bagoas, stretched to spider on the wheel,

Knows nothing of the venom.

But of the queen's ill-will—has noted it

Due to some confidence this Sohemus

Dropped in her ear, before you came from Rome.

SOHEMUS. The creature is in agony and weaving

A lie for relaxation of his pain.

What should I tell the queen?

A messenger came to the fortress rarely

As song-bird to the desert. What invent?

I heard no tidings, nor could weave her tales.

Bagoas prowled about his royal lady

If but my step was heard, if but its echo

From distant rooms.

HEROD (*crying out*).

Her paramour!

SOHEMUS.

My king—

HEROD. Call in the palace guard ! . . .

SOHEMUS.

But if through pity—

The Guard enter

HEROD. Take this dishonoured officer to death.

What is it that astounds you? By confession,

Wrung from Bagoas on the rack, he loosed
A secret of my will to Mariamne
The queen.

SOHEMUS. The queen is guiltless.

HEROD. Out! Begone! Begone!

SOHEMUS. But hear me——

HEROD. Take him out!

[*Exit Guard with SOHEMUS.*

Gross transformations!

I have been struck

As thunder-struck, nor know what I have
said.

Yet I remember

She rose to call me slave, and struck far back.
Slave! There is left

One vast perfecting : she shall surely die.

SALOME. Swift as her paramour.

HEROD. No. I am husband

Of Mariamne to condemn the traitor

Who won my rights as favours of her love. . . .

She is queen of Jewry, and must take her trial.

Salome, do you think I turn to mercy

In showing her to all—this murderess, this
Converser with familiars, twice a whore,
To Joseph, then to Sohemus!

. . . The judge
Who sat against the city-gate is in me,
As I were sitting there—men coming
through,

And going forth, and cries, and camel-loads
Of burthens, and the country with big lights
And clouds from over it—and I the judge.
Brother, you know my friends
Within the Sanhedrin: convoke their
numbers,

Convoke the council for to-morrow. . . . Send
A eunuch to prepare the bath . . . So hot!
Salome, go, sit down beside my mother,
And keep her from me. . . . All about the
doors

Of the women's quarters there are sentries
standing

With naked swords. . . . The hive stopped
up! Salome,

Go, little sister! [*Exit SALOME.*

I shall lie an hour

Or longer in the bath ; and meet to-night
The friendly Rabbis of the Sanhedrin ;
Set on the scribes
With the accusation. We must leave excuse

For no regret. There are wide doors that
others

Must open, not ourselves. There are wide
doors,

Too heavy ; and beyond them. . . .

Do you see,
It must be ruled to-night among us, judged
In court to-morrow ? [Exit PHERORAS.

Is there night and day ?
Black . . . white . . .

I have untressed my hair !
Am I not now untressing it ?

No action !
She must be judged indifferent . . .

A EUNUCH (*opening a curtain and bowing*).
The bath !

SCENE II

*Jerusalem. The evening of the next day. An
apartment facing west, in the king's house.
It gives on the columns of a vestibule.*

CYPROS *and* SALOME

CYPROS. Do you hear him—hear my son ; his
ceaseless treading

As the creatures tread at night ?

SALOME. I hear him, mother ;
He is stepping out her doom.

CYPROS. You hear his treading,
Soft on the carpet, struck against the
marble ?

Would she were dead, who hated him to
death !

Why does he place a guard, as round a city,
Deep round the women's chambers of the
palace,

As strong a guard as he besieged a city ?

SALOME. Had he but looked on her,

Those mournful, sable eyes and lids in
shadow

Under the pearl-laced crown, that brow in
shadow,

And the obdurate mouth had been a charm
To honour as to fortitude. But, mother,
She strives to send no message; she is
silent

As trophies or cold statues.

CYPROS.

Listen, listen!

Is he not treading nearer? But I fear it,
As when the heel of thunder clangs at
hand. . . .

I will run the other way. To-morrow!

[*Exit.*

SALOME.

Ay—

To-morrow for the mother and the son. . . .

Our time is now, Herod's and mine!

(*Looking out.*) Day fills its arc; and there is
quietness

From heat and sunlight—there are shadows.

Enter HEROD

Herod,

My brother . . .

HEROD. Do not stop me with your words.

SALOME. Stay but a little . . .

(*She catches his hand.*) See,

How cooler and more dark it is!

HEROD. More dark!

SALOME. A daylight blue without the sun—
and quiet

About the buildings. . . .

You are with me now.

HEROD. . . . Salome, out beyond

The Dead Sea there is country where the
lions,

The terrible wild beasts upon the tracks,

Sicken of fever every other day,

Sicken, or else they would destroy the
world. . . .

Sicken of fever in the tracks . . .

The hunters told me when I was a boy.

[*He throws himself down on some
cushions.*]

Salome, have you met

And passed a lion on his path? They
told me

A man should never turn his eyes

To watch the lion, for that would waken
 anger,
Though he were sick. . . . You did not set
 your eyes
On mine. . . . Salome, every one has
 hurried
Before me after gazing ; but no faintness
Of heart is in you, and no rage in me,
Only this freezing fever.

[He begins to shiver.]

SALOME.

Take my stole.

[She goes to the door and calls.]

Bring wine, with grain of pepper-corns.

*[She comes back to him ; an attendant
brings a cordial and goes out.]*

Drink, drink !

HEROD *(after drinking)*. Salome . . .

O God of Israel, God of my Temple,
The stories of my childhood !

 In a heathen,
Untrammelled fever of my soul, Salome,
I even could pray
Thul Kholsa, the old idol of our fathers,
Patron of safety in affairs of peace,

Patron of safety in affairs of bloodshed ;
And cast a sheaf of arrows at his feet
For consultation, watching, for my omen,
The figures made upon the ground, as fall
The arrows. . . . I, so deft in archery—
I would be safe, I would be safe—

Cast arrows

To know myself secure. . . .

SALOME.

Hush! Are you mad

Indeed? Why?

*[He rises and moves toward the sunset, so
that he has his back to SALOME.]*

HEROD.

I have thoughts

Of respite and reprieve. . . .

SALOME.

Herod!

HEROD.

Of respite

And of reprieve—not from a tomb, but
death ;

Not from her burial, from immolation,

Banishment to the void and from the air!

Not so escape! But there are fortresses—

Masada by the Dead Sea coast ;

There I could bury her as in a coffin,

Each sigh of wind a death-song over her.

Were not that best? A tower her monument,
ment,

Yet she not dead, not out of all account,
Still mortal, still not absolutely lost ;

Coffered, not confined—not inanimate,
Held in the jaws of her sarcophagus,
Unseen of living nature, but alive . . .

With the cloud eyes of her, the silken
cheek,

Even the voice of rough-edged undertone,
Enamouring offence. There none would
love her,

None! But my treasury
Would have sealed riches, not a destitute,
Defaulting cave. Among the coins and
jewels,

Locked-up regalia and spoil—a queen. . . .
The difference! . . .

There in the rusty gloom accessible.
The difference! I think she shall not die.

I think of fortresses—

Masada by the Dead Sea coast.

I ponder not to kill her, but immure.

SALOME. Surfeit your hatred

Upon my love! Brother, the feast be full!
But listen, while you feed upon your hatred,
And I will play, in love, Love's instruments
Against your ear. Listen! This Jewess—
listen!

Does she not make you opposite in nature
To your own self? You have won honour,
Herod;
Your people called you *Great*!

Imperial Rome
Has found your brow incapable except
Of one adornment that was given, a crown.
Will you, who won Arabian wars and settled
Your crown on you by siege and battle-
field,

Be made so tender by a cruel wanton,
That when her spite would murder you your
blood
Claims not her blood's atonement?

You that hold
The Romans as true governors of earth,
The judges—the firm lips and brains!—you
summon
A Council, you demand a sentence passed,

Your will her condemnation ; and you shiver
With feverous weakness and unsay the sentence

The law pronounced and the king ratified !
Oh, is this man worthy a Roman ensign,
Worthy an eagle in the air above him,
Worthy the friendship of the lords of earth ?

[A Eunuch stands at the door.]

EUNUCH. Rabbi Shemaiah prays to see the
king.

SALOME. Will you receive him ? Send him
back—he is

An enemy within the Sanhedrin.

HEROD. I will receive him.

SALOME. Herod, you are ragged
And lank, not in your majesty.

HEROD. The king
Will hear Rabbi Shemaiah.

[Exit Eunuch.]

*[HEROD and SALOME keep silent : she
kneels down on her cushion and looks at
the sundown till SHEMAIAH enters, when
she turns and watches her brother.]*

SHEMAIAH. O lord king,

Grant your forgiveness that I speak the
words

Of many at your feet ; temper your wisdom
With mercy ; press not with intemperance
Of haste against the Asmonean lady,
Your queen condemned—but while the
proofs are dark

Against her shining as your wife, remove
her

To solitude of prison, and awhile
Hold back from her the final penalty
On which no light can shine. My voice is
many

A voice in prayer.

HEROD. We turn not from our sentence.

SHEMAIAH. Turn not, but linger

Awhile the days before it be fulfilled.

HEROD. My wrath is on you, Rabbi, and on
those

Who would turn back from their own judg-
ment : never

Will I, the judge, turn so. Remorselessly
Our God effects for justice, and remorseless
Before men's fear should be that governor

Who holds him to his rulership—his sentence
Shall be of doom, shall stand, shall domineer.

SHEMAIAH. The Jews have loved her.

HEROD. Have they?

SHEMAIAH. Their deliverance
By Judas and his brethren, as rich spice
In wine, has glorified her stately blood ;
They would not see it shed save for such guilt
As many days have looked upon with strict-
ness
Of light and argument.

HEROD. My wrath is on you.
Old man, I am the judge, I am the king—
There will not be a queen : I am her hus-
band.

The voices you would have me listen to
Are low down, far behind, far off—the
croaking

Of frogs at night-time . . . There is night
for me,

And dawn to come and sliding day. . . .

Go back,
Far off!—Bid those that sit and croak with
you

Remember how august the Sanhedrin
Would rule the sons of Jacob. Say the
king

Will turn not from his sentence for an hour.

SHEMAIAH. God save you! [Exit.

SALOME. Herod—

HEROD. I shall stay here, Salome; not with
you,

But not alone. . . . There is no track for
sleep

To wander after me; I shall not sleep,
Not at the hour when night is dead asleep.

Send Nicholas to read his History,
To read it on and on, and by my hearing
Tangle my fancy that I may not image
The heaved sword and the eyes'

Last kindness to the light—

The hollow in them at the severance
Of the adored head from its bodily form
And appertaining stature . . .

[*He begins to wander backward and
forward.*

If I listen
To Nicholas it will be as a sea—

What men have done and suffered—as a sea
Pouring upon my ears ; and it will tangle
Imagination that it shall not raise me
My bridal chamber at Samaria,
The adored head on my bosom, the young
body
Loving me close, in very oneness, flesh
Even of my flesh—our bridal a flower's heart
Of balsam, and our secrecy . . . To-morrow
The people watch her to her death.

Salome,

Call Nicholas . . .

I shall stay here, for dawn
Comes on the other side : the sun
Comes on the other side.

Send Nicholas !

SCENE III

*The balcony of QUEEN ALEXANDRA'S house,
overlooking the courtyard of the royal
palace, filled with people.*

ALEXANDRA. I am waiting to see her pass : it
is a spectacle. She has grown very beautiful

in her silence. She will not look on me ;
she refuses to say farewell.

*[Turning back at the sound within of
angry babble.*

No, children, no ! They must not look—
I will not lift you up. No !

A VOICE. What is it ?

ALEXANDRA. It is nothing : it is some one who
must die.

THE VOICE. Then lift me up.

ALEXANDRA. It may be she will turn if she
hears the child. My beautiful one ! I must
see her !

[She brings out ALEXANDER in her arms.

ALEXANDER. Where is it ? The people stand
together with close feet. Where is it ? There
is no music.

ALEXANDRA. Peace ! But when she comes,
call for her ; speak her name.

*[Enter, at a distance, MARIAMNE ; behind
her, her waiting-maid, JUDITH ; then
her executioners and a guard. A low
groan with weeping is heard from the
crowd.*

ALEXANDER (*struggling free*). I will not see it!

Aristobulus, it is our mother. . . . I will go to her!

[*He runs within; there are sounds of struggle and of sobs.*]

ALEXANDRA. A victim! I have borne but victims, I

Of the Deliverer's bone and blood. A victim!

The Jewish royal glory
Before me criminal, abased.

My people,
You are weeping, Israel, you are weeping
her!

Should you not weep? I am a rootless stem,
I have no son:

I gave this child a bridegroom, who exalted
And raised her up a queen.

And she refused
This saviour of our race,
Enraged his love with insolence and harsh-
ness,
Nor feared him, nor obeyed him, nor with
wisdom

Guided herself, nor counsel. Oh, behold
her,
Your crown laid in the dust, my shame, my
sorrow . . .

Mariamne !

[MARIAMNE, *who is now below the window,*
pauses, but does not look.

I am aged,
I have few years ; you have made them grey
to me,
Grey years . . .

My people, she has closed her heart.
She that betrayed her race, her doting hus-
band,
Her tender children, she has closed her heart.
Where is the Rose
Of Sharon, where the Lily of the Valleys ?
My people, I have seen my kindred perish,
I have no son, . . . and she has closed her
heart.

[MARIAMNE *neither looks nor moves.* Sud-
denly ALEXANDRA leans over the balcony,
till her head is in line with her knees.

Judith !—My service now !

MARIAMNE. I shall want her by for my disrobing. . . . No,

Pass to your mistress.

[JUDITH *hesitates, but* MARIAMNE'S *hand forces her to leave the procession. Some one in the crowd throws MARIAMNE a rose ; it falls at her feet, and JUDITH picks it up, giving it to her mistress, while they say good-bye with their eyes. MARIAMNE walks on, wrapping her hands round the flower. JUDITH goes into ALEXANDRA'S house, and in a little while comes on to the balcony.*

ALEXANDRA. You have touched her robe ; oh, you have touched her hair—

My child !

You could not have disrobed her, child.

Nay, do not weep !

[*She holds JUDITH against her breast for a moment, then looses her.*

Go, bring me back the raiment of my child,
And the tresses of her blood. . . .

SCENE IV

Samaria: the king's house. A large apartment; at the back closed curtains that separate it from an ante-room.

The body of MARIAMNE has been embalmed and laid in a high-erected sarcophagus with a crystal lid. ALEXANDER and ARISTOBULUS, her young children, creep up to it, toys in their hands.

ALEXANDER. O Aristobulus, one day I shall be a man; then we shall be great soldiers. . . .

Let us play—let us play at taking Jerusalem.

[They sit on the floor beyond the sarcophagus and begin a game. CYPROS, with lynx-like movement, steals down, where, unseen, she can observe them.]

ARISTOBULUS. Here are not bricks enough.

ALEXANDER *(taking his hand)*. I will get you bricks out where the sand wren is singing.

(Seeing CYPROS.) Why are you here? Why do you watch us?

CYPROS *(grinning through her wrinkles)*. I am

the enemy that will destroy your city.
Have a care!

ARISTOBULUS. Women cannot destroy cities.
Move back!

NICHOLAS *comes to the door with a deep obeisance.*

NICHOLAS. Lady Cypros, may I enter?

[She gives sign of assent.]

I find the palace an unguarded tomb; all the
doors are wide, and all the ministrants dis-
persed—the king absent.

CYPROS. I am guardian of the princes, I their
grandmother: I am guardian of the tomb.

[She laughs.]

NICHOLAS. The king—

CYPROS (*suddenly clasping the knees of NICHOLAS*). If you could break the seal upon
his heart!

He hunts the wilderness, and very far
Our young men tracked his wandering yes-
terday:

They heard a cry as lonely
As the rock-partridges in rocky close!
Sometimes at dead of night he brings a torch

To look at her, and laughs long in the flame ;
And then the torch is lost, and I hear groan-
ing

As never I have heard it since my travail.
I fear my son will die. You are without,
You move in the open earth—where is my son?

[NICHOLAS trembles and looks fearfully at
the sarcophagus.

NICHOLAS. This is the secret—and his centre
here ;

And this the pestilence he would escape,
And carries to the desert.

[He goes up to the sarcophagus.

Wonderful!

A mystery of Venus laid aside
To rest in the gold watches of the sea,
And like a trophy, or a spoil of war.

CYPROS (*behind, plucking his sleeve*). Is she an
evil spirit craving blood ?

[A voice is heard in the tone of command,
and silence falls on the whispering of
women's voices behind the curtain.

HEROD lifts it and runs up rapidly to the
sarcophagus. CYPROS shrinks back.

HEROD. See, Nicholas!

I scan her eyelids . . . folly is not there,
Nor folly as a sackcloth on her face.

[*Scanning* MARIAMNE.

It is most curious, she grows
And changes like a sunrise in its clouds ;
She is not fading from me. And sometimes
She smiles ; and there are moments she for-
gives me,

And moments of revenge.

[*Suddenly* HEROD *descends the steps of the
sarcophagus, and motions to* NICHOLAS
to sit.

Well, friend ! Well, Nicholas ?
Tell me what tidings from Jerusalem.
'Tis long since we have met.

[*Perceiving* CÝPROS *seated on the steps that
lead up to the curtained ante-room.*

How patient, mother,
You sit, how patient !

[*He goes to her and lays his head on her
knees.*

There ! I have been hunting,
And I am hungry.

CYPROS. Son, you are a-hungered?

You will do well, will live, though thin and
wasted.

HEROD. Fetch me the meat I love—go, cook
it for me . . .

The fresh meat from the hunt.

[*Exit* CYPROS.

I am hungry past my wont. In all my
hunting

I have killed nothing : it is all a void

Out on the shrieking fields and dunes . . .

I asked

My mother for fresh food . . . but I have
planned

A greater festival. To-night I banquet.

Music!

[*He turns sharply toward the sarcophagus.*

No, no! I have not touched her harp.
No music!—I have passed into her garden,
And cut the roses one by one, a harvest
For the great banquet and the many wreaths.
It must be all accomplished of a sudden,
For I must end this solitude.

Full wickers

Of roses have been carried to the women—
They are weaving them within.

(*Smiling.*) Philosopher,
And you will start a theme :
Was Alexander greater of his day
Than Cæsar was of his? Some swelling theme
To strike a noise from all.

But do not leave me !

[*He moves round and perceives his sons.*
Well, children—at your play ?

[*They rise and leave their toys on the
ground.*

Come back !

Why were you playing in this
room ?

[*The children shrink before him. HEROD
convulsively clutches them and holds
them down on each side.*

Who was it gave you leave?—What scares
you ?

You love her? Listen, you shall always love
her. She is as a goddess—but we must not
be afraid of her ; she is not close by you on
the earth as I am close. Children, I love

you in your play. I would not break it. This city . . . you besiege it? (*One of the boys nods; with trembling hands HEROD picks up some of the toys.*) I will play with you. You must talk and teach me how to play. (*The children remain stubborn.*) What would you like to do? Would you like me to tell you a story? (*They shake their heads.*) Not a story? Not how I killed Hezekiah, the robber-captain, when a lad as young as David? (*They still shake their heads.*) Not that;—but the vengeance I took for my father Antipater, your grandfather; blood for his blood . . . or the Arabian War, the captives taken in their thousands? You shall become great as I am great: I can teach you. Will you listen? When I was in Rome . . .

ALEXANDER. Father, we would go to Rome . . .
Send us away to Rome!

[*They spring back frightened at themselves.*]

HEROD.

To Rome?

[*He remains staring at the thought. The younger boy turns back and kisses his hand.*]

ARISTOBULUS. May we go, father? May we go?
We shall come back again.

HEROD. Go, go for ever!
[*They run away terrified.*]

They shall go, they shall go—shall be made
kings.

How natural it is! . . .

And I am left alone. How natural
One's children should go forth from one to
Rome . . .

And all the voices die!

I cannot be alone, for she is there.

And yet I should not dare to waken her,
Not from her sleep. And yet . . .

Call on her, call,
Call on her by her name! I dare not call.
She must not think I call, but she must be
Persuaded back to me. Go, bid her women
Call her as when she was their mistress.

Set them
To stand behind the columns of the house,
And call her home.

NICHOLAS (*controlling his terror*). I will instruct
the women.

HEROD. Fetch them to hear their charge.

[NICHOLAS *opens the curtains: the women are weaving wreaths of roses for the guests of the evening. A nurse and the children are with them.*

NICHOLAS. The king commands you
To the king's presence.

[*They drop the roses, some at once, some as they come forward.*

HEROD. Women of my house,
The house is silent : there is but one name
To break for me the solitude. Disperse you
Among the columns ; call your mistress back,
Call her to me, call one by one !
If this is but a frenzy to your thoughts,
Do not pursue your thoughts ; stay them
with me.

Call her as on the mountains God was called
By Jephthah's daughter and her troop of
maidens,

The servants of her house.

You have soft voices ;
I heard them creep about the silence.

Rouse them

Forth, as the desert lark's, to fetch your lady
Home to her house and husband.

Lift your roses—

The fresh blooms in your hands, disperse, and
call her name. [*The women disperse.*

Others must call! . . .

I am to her a stranger of the tents . . .

Woe to the tents lost in the stony plains!

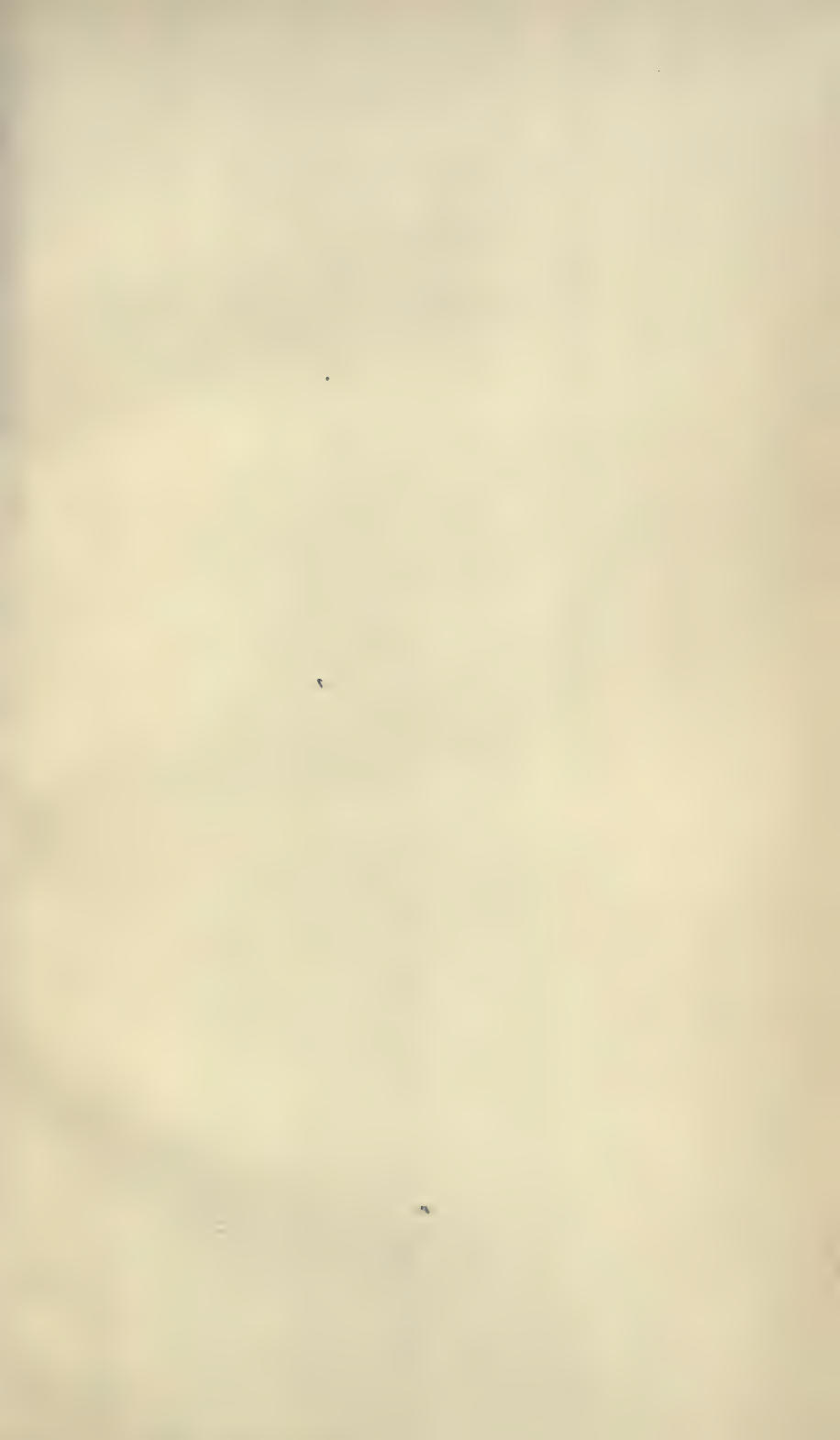
[*Suddenly women's voices severally and in
unison call many times, near and far
away.*

VOICES. Mariamne! Mariamne! Mariamne!

[*The children run to their nurse in terror,
and she covers their heads with her veil.*

HEROD bends his face down on the lid of
the sarcophagus. The voices call on:
through them his loud whisper is heard
to the corpse.

HEROD. Mariamne!



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Field, Michael (pseud.)
Queen Mariamne

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